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Fifty-third Session

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Wednesday, 30 September 1998, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Filippi Balestra (San Marino), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The Acting President: The Assembly will first hear an address by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Senegal and for Senegalese living abroad, His Excellency Mr. Jacques Baudin.

Mr. Baudin (Senegal) (*interpretation from French*): Senegal takes pleasure in addressing, through me, its heartfelt congratulations to the President on his illustrious election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. His election is eloquent testimony to his intellectual and moral qualities and to his vast experience in international relations, and also reflects the unanimous recognition by the Member States of our Organization of your country, Uruguay, for its ongoing commitment in the service of international peace and cooperation.

We express profound gratitude to his predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, for the skill and commitment with which he discharged his duty throughout a particularly difficult year.

Finally, I should like to pay a well-deserved tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, a man of conviction who deserves our unreserved support in the pursuit and achievement of the outstanding work of reform, to which he is fully committed in order to ready our Organization to meet the realities of the twenty-first century.

The annual sessions of the General Assembly provide special opportunities for the great United Nations family to come together to consider collectively and thoughtfully the situation of the world and the problems and challenges that our Organization must meet as it seeks to bring about peace, progress and solidarity for human society.

As this century fades, we are living in an era marked by major challenges that involve all of us individually and collectively. Our world is in the throes of transformation, internationally as well as within each of our States, and our transition towards the third millennium is not without certain contradictions.

Globalization has become a worldwide phenomenon. The movement of people and ideas, the computer and information revolutions, the protection of the environment and the fight against drugs and terrorism have also become transnational phenomena that call for global reform and thoroughgoing international solidarity, which is the only thing that will allow us to attain our major objectives — for while we are all similar, we are also all different.

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At the same time, fragmentations are increasing and differences are asserting themselves at the national level, thereby leading to civil wars and ethnic and tribal conflicts that often jeopardize the structure of our States. Formidable wealth has been created for a tiny minority, while vast expanses of absolute poverty remain; and while human rights are exalted here, they are mocked or trampled underfoot elsewhere.

The United Nations, which is the repository of the universal conscience, must adapt to these changing realities and develop the capacity to act, often with urgency, in the service of peace and to respond appropriately to the legitimate aspirations of humankind. As we seek to attain the goals that are before us, our Member States have the responsibility and the duty to endow our Organization with the tools that will allow it effectively and rapidly to implement the agenda for the twenty-first century.

In this context, I should like to emphasize and welcome two major developments that have marked the recent history of the United Nations. I shall refer first to the establishment of the International Criminal Court, not because it takes priority but because the head of State of my country, President Abdou Diouf, has conferred upon me the honour of being involved in this issue for the past two years. Senegal was among the first signatories of the Statute of the Court and is waiting only for the certified copy before ratifying it. The Diplomatic Conference in Rome was without doubt a historic gathering, as for the first time the nations of the world, in particular those from Africa, united by a single and shared desire for justice, together found a legal means of deterring those who might be tempted to commit crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of genocide; a means of bringing them to trial, if there are grounds for doing so; and a means of sentencing them if they are found guilty. In short, we have succeeded in forging the missing link in the international legal system.

That gathering will also be remembered as historic because the Statute of the Court, which we solemnly adopted on 18 July 1998, in such a symbolically rich place as Rome, introduced major innovations in relations between States and between national and international jurisdictions.

Finally, if anyone needs to be reminded, I am happy to say that the Statute and the final act governing the Court complement, and thereby imbue with greater meaning, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose fiftieth anniversary we are commemorating this year as one of the great milestone events in the history of the United Nations. What is more, the Statute makes the ideal of justice more precise and more alive.

I am pleased to say that my country, Senegal, recently became the first State member of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to ratify the Protocol on the Establishment of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, which was adopted at the most recent OAU summit in Ouagadougou.

Last year, during the fifty-second regular session of the General Assembly, we all warmly welcomed the reform proposals of the Secretary-General, contained in his report (A/51/950) entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform". We were unanimous in believing that those judicious, balanced, innovative and action-oriented proposals were very timely because they were in tune with the spirit and letter of the Declaration issued on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary, which stated:

> "In order to be able to respond effectively to the challenges of the future and the expectations of the United Nations held by peoples around the world, it is essential that the United Nations itself be reformed and modernized." (*resolution 50/6, para. 14*)

This conviction, which we all shared, has today become an imperative. Indeed, through the dynamic impetus provided by the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, Mr. Udovenko, the General Assembly adopted resolutions through which it endorsed and reaffirmed the implementation of the measures and proposals recommended by the Secretary-General. In this regard, I should like to convey my sincere congratulations to Ms. Louise Fréchette, who has been appointed to the distinguished position of Deputy Secretary-General of our Organization, with particular responsibility for development issues. To her, our partner in development, I wish every success in carrying out her honourable and important mission.

In calling to mind the reforms that will enable the United Nations to become the cornerstone of a multilateral system better attuned to the realities of the twenty-first century, I could not ignore the delicate and complex negotiations under way within the Working Group entrusted with the question of restructuring the Security Council. Security Council reform is a fundamental element in the overall reform of the United

Nations, but we must recognize that it will not be an easy task.

We all agree on the need to modernize and democratize that essential United Nations body, but we are finding it difficult to reach consensus, or even general agreement, on such fundamental issues as the enlargement, composition and right of veto. Despite five years of discussions within the Working Group, we must not abandon our hopes and become discouraged. If we redouble our efforts and benefit from the momentum that we have created, I am convinced that in due course we will succeed in this great undertaking to restructure the Security Council by conferring on it greater legitimacy, credibility and transparency.

Africa certainly has its place in this reform — a place that must be acknowledged given its history and its destiny as a continent of the future in which there is room for continued growth.

The United Nations has traversed half a century, and during the course of those years we have progressively laid the groundwork for an international system that should be able to ensure our collective security. In this regard, our Organization has been and remains an irreplaceable tool for the promotion and maintenance of international peace and security. Despite the numerous achievements recorded in that area, we must agree about how much farther we have to travel, as well as about the bold initiatives to be taken in order fully to secure international peace and security.

Longstanding conflicts continue to resist our efforts at resolving them, while a number of fresh crises — a new generation of conflicts linked to an upswell in ethnic or intercommunity violence — continue to be a source of major concern for our countries, especially those in Africa.

Thus, in the subregion of western Africa, while Sierra Leone was moving towards the total restoration of constitutional order with the return to Freetown of the democratically elected President owing to efforts by the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity and especially the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a mutiny broke out on 7 June last, spearheaded by part of the standing army of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau.

At the express request of the legal authorities of that country, Senegal and the Republic of Guinea, another neighbour of Guinea-Bissau, dispatched troops in accordance with the relevant provisions of the bilateral agreements signed by each of the two countries with Guinea-Bissau.

I should like to reiterate that Senegal's involvement in Guinea-Bissau is designed solely to help restore constitutional order, ward off threats to the safety of the civilian populations and foreigners, and contribute to the strengthening of stability and security in the subregion and throughout Africa.

On 26 August 1998, ECOWAS, together with the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, succeeded in inducing the parties to sign a ceasefire accord, the first step towards the normalization of life in Guinea-Bissau.

In the Horn of Africa, we have witnessed a drastic downturn in the relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Indeed, the armies of those two fraternal countries — forced by history, geography and culture to live in perfect harmony and peace — launched military operations. And yet there have been numerous initiatives designed to bring about a political solution of this new conflict. The brotherly Governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea should agree to sit down at the negotiating table and endeavour, with the help of the current Chairman of the OAU, the countries of the subregion and other participants of goodwill, to find ways and means of reaching a peaceful solution.

Elsewhere on the continent, in Angola and in Somalia, the road to peace is winding — if not tortuous — and uncertainty continues to prevail.

Allow me to pay once again from this rostrum a respectful tribute to the memory of Maître Alioune Blondin Beye, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Angola, and of his companions in misfortune, who included our fellow countryman Moctar Gueye, a journalist, all of whom died in an accident on the field of honour in the service of peace.

All of Africa aspires to progress and to a better life, even though the conflicts it is enduring continue to pose major obstacles to a balanced and lasting economic and social development. We therefore have the obligation and the duty, as members of the family of nations, to continue to strive to bring about a world order that is more stable, equitable and just.

Aware of this reality, Africans together, working in concert with the OAU and in close cooperation with the United Nations, are participating more and more actively

in regional efforts aimed at conflict prevention, management and resolution.

I should like to take this opportunity to welcome the publication of the Secretary-General's report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa. In this invaluable report, the Secretary-General offers a well thought out and objective analysis of the causes of conflicts in Africa, rightly pinpointing the close link between stability and development, and finally recommending criteria, conditions and ways and means of ensuring, building and safeguarding peace in the interest of sustainable development in Africa.

My country, Senegal, convinced of the importance of peace in the Middle East and of the need for greater progress in that respect, is actively supporting the peace process and remains committed to the achievement of peace in the region based on the relevant resolutions and agreements, which must be respected by all parties, if only on the basis of the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*.

The time is ripe urgently to call once again on the parties involved, the co-sponsors and all peace-loving nations to ensure that fresh initiatives are taken to reconcile the widely divergent viewpoints of the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel in order to restore a climate of confidence and cooperation, which is the only possible basis for peace and peaceful coexistence among the peoples of the region.

Ongoing efforts to bring about general, complete and verifiable disarmament represent a major step in strengthening international security. While significant progress has been made in this realm in the past decade, we must acknowledge that global disarmament, today more than ever, remains a long-range objective.

Indeed, the conflicts we have seen in recent years have demonstrated that the massive destruction caused by conventional arms requires that initiatives be taken to deter their proliferation, and in particular the illicit traffic in small-calibre weapons, now a real scourge in Africa. Major efforts are being mobilized on the continent to fight this threat, but it is obvious that Africa alone cannot possibly overcome it. Senegal will spare no effort to contribute to the elaboration of an international convention to fight the illicit traffic in small-calibre weapons.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the universal character of the United Nations has achieved wide acceptance, and its universality gives our Organization greater credibility and effectiveness.

In keeping with this principle, Senegal unreservedly supports the request by the Republic of China to rejoin the community of free nations and to be admitted as a member of our Organization and of its specialized agencies. Accordingly, we have proposed that the General Assembly reconsider that part of resolution 2758 (XXVI) that excluded the Republic of China from the United Nations and from its specialized agencies.

In keeping with its purpose — to be a centre where nations work together for social progress through the achievement of improved living conditions — the United Nations has made a remarkable contribution to pinpointing the problems facing humankind.

Throughout this decade, the United Nations has held a series of major conferences that have enabled the international community to adopt at the highest political level a set of consensual plans of action. These have laid the foundation for a new global partnership for development based upon the principle of national responsibility and the imperative of international solidarity, in the quest for a united response to the challenges that face all of us. Never before has so generous and so highly promising an approach been taken to the concerns felt by the community of nations.

These action plans, apart from their degree of relevance, constitute a set of formal commitments on measures that should be taken together. Without the corresponding mobilization of new and additional resources, the specific actions expected from these noble initiatives, whose grandeur and legitimacy derive their very force from the ideals embodied in the Charter itself, are liable to translate into severely compromised or dashed hopes.

Above and beyond the problems linked to implementing the results of the major conferences held throughout the decade, the fact is that international cooperation for development now poses a paradox that we cannot ignore without betraying the ideals of peace and development that inspired the founding fathers of our Organization.

Miguel de Unamuno, Rector of the University of Salamanca in Spain, once said:

"Under certain circumstances, to keep silent is to lie".

How, then, can we remain silent before the obvious contradiction between the incessant expansion of needs for economic cooperation for development and the constant decline in official development assistance, which is today at its lowest level in 25 years? How can we forget the persistent imbalances in multilateral international trade, whose first and foremost role was, after all, to ensure for everyone, in developed and developing countries alike, the benefits of a trading mechanism that was to be open, regulated, transparent, equitable and predictable? What values of humanity can still be invoked when at the dawn of the third millennium, in a world that has become a global village, over a billion men and women are deprived of even the barest elements of a decent life? The marginalization and exclusion that haunt the daily lives of these men and women give proof once again of the absolute priority that the fight against poverty must have at both the national and international levels.

This is why strong measures to breathe new life into North-South exchanges are today more imperative than ever. The General Assembly's high-level debate devoted to relaunching a dialogue to strengthen international cooperation through partnership and the draft plan for an international gathering at the highest level for development financing are encouraging initiatives, as would be initiatives for fair compensation for commodities and a global settlement of the debt crisis of developing countries.

The fifty-third session of the General Assembly coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The promotion, consolidation and expansion of the underpinnings of the State based on the rule of law throughout the world; the strengthening of national institutions for the defence of human rights; the integration of human rights into the major activities of the United Nations system; the promotion of the right to development — these seem to us to be the essential pillars of a global policy for the benefit of human rights and freedoms at the end of this century.

In this context, my delegation would like to salute the major initiatives undertaken by Mrs. Mary Robinson, High Commissioner for Human Rights since she took office, particularly those directed to our continent, Africa, which are fully in keeping with our expectations. This means, in fact, that more than ever before, we must promote dialogue with Governments, strengthen dialogue between institutions within the United Nations system and strive to rationalize the machinery of human rights.

The fight against the global drug problem remains a concern shared by the entire international community because of the multiple and pernicious ties that drug-trafficking has been able to establish with phenomena such as transnational organized crime, terrorism, large-scale banditry and illegal arms-trafficking networks — particularly those involving small calibre weapons, especially in Africa. This illicit trafficking in narcotics and psychotropic substances has become a dangerous threat to the peace, stability and security of all nations, States and regions of the world at the end of the millennium.

This is why my country, Senegal, welcomed the holding last June in the presence of numerous heads of State and of Government in this Hall of the special session of the General Assembly devoted to the drug problem. Now it is important for all of us to work for the effective implementation of the important conclusions reached at that meeting, both at the national and international levels.

Before I conclude, allow me to say a few words about the financial crisis and the need to strengthen the effectiveness of the United Nations. Our Organization has been in the midst of a very worrisome financial situation for several years now. The causes of this situation have been debated at length right here and it does not seem necessary for me to recall them now. I would simply like to stress that the reform process that we have all undertaken cannot possibly be brought to a successful conclusion within this situation of financial instability that the Organization is experiencing at a time when it is being called upon to act on many different fronts.

The new international context, and the multidimensional nature of the challenges to be met require that we have a restructured and modernized United Nations that is endowed with the capabilities necessary to come to our help in resolving our disputes, eliminating injustices and disparities and avoiding exclusion and selfishness.

It is enough for us to want these things, because we possess the resources and capabilities to attain them. Humanity has already met so many challenges in the course of its troubled history that we can have no doubt

now that it is indeed capable of meeting the challenges of the third millennium as well.

So far as we are concerned in Senegal, under the leadership of Mr. Abdou Diouf, President of the Republic, we are ready to shoulder our responsibilities in a genuine spirit of solidarity and collective effort in order to realize our ambitions and dreams. We owe it to ourselves, but especially to the generations to come.

Address by Mr. Janez Drnovsek, Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia.

Mr. Janez Drnovsek, Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, His Excellency Mr. Janez Drnovsek, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Drnovsek (Slovenia): Let me take this opportunity to congratulate the President and his country, Uruguay, on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. I am convinced that his experience and skills will help the General Assembly fulfil its important tasks.

I would also like to thank Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko of Ukraine for his work as President and to commend him on his decisive guidance during the deliberations of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

The world order is being rearranged. Our time is marked by continuous change. It is of crucial importance that this process of change take place in a peaceful way and under the rules which the international community has agreed upon. The United Nations has an indispensable role in that regard and must be able to respond to the world's needs. While it is true that the United Nations is a framework within which the Member States can pursue their own national interests, the United Nations is above all an instrument for making the common goals and aspirations of humankind a realistic programme for a better future.

The world and its goals and challenges are changing, and the United Nations has to change as well. It was a wise decision for the Member States to support the Secretary-General's programme for reform and help him undertake the necessary measures. We are glad to see that some of the steps of this excellent programme have already made the United Nations more responsive and more effective.

Only an efficient universal organization can help us cope with the pressing challenges of globalization, economic and social development, environmental changes and the urgent need to protect and respect human rights. We need the United Nations to protect our highest and most basic goal: the maintenance of international peace and security. Therefore, we expect that the remaining proposals of the Secretary-General will be approved by the Members during this session of the General Assembly. This will allow us to move forward in the reform and transformation of our United Nations.

Slovenia attaches special importance to the promotion of the noble principles and values upon which the United Nations is built. This is why we were especially proud to be elected a non-permanent member of the Security Council. The implementation of our key foreign-policy objectives, which we pursue in our work and endeavours in the Security Council, is, however, challenged by an increasing number of threats to peace and stability. Judgement, compassion and determination must guide us in our struggle to offer new hope for suffering people.

From the Balkans to Central Africa and Central Asia, a particular type of warfare seems to be prevailing in all conflicts. The civilian population is the main — and, very often, also the only — target. Violations of human rights, international humanitarian law and the most horrible atrocities are becoming the usual consequences of these conflicts. These violations and their political root causes must be addressed by the international community from the very start. We must act with unity and determination to ensure that violations of humanitarian law and human rights do not remain unpunished.

There are actors in the international community who still believe that the threat or use of force is a legitimate means of change. They consider political solutions and negotiations only after and if military options fail. We can see this in Africa, where new crises are succeeding the old ones. We can see it in the continued arms race, even in the nuclear field. We can also see it in Europe, with Kosovo offering yet another humanitarian tragedy. As if all of this were not enough, we also face the lowest, the most unjustified violence of all —

international terrorism, which has harmed hundreds of innocent victims.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina the peace process is slowly but definitely extending its roots. However, this process has not yet become irreversible. The international community still has an important role in leading the post-conflict management of the situation. There is a growing need to ensure economic reconstruction and provide adequate economic aid. Slovenia is actively participating in those efforts.

Many important issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina remain to be solved. The number of returning refugees, especially among minorities, has been substantially lower than expected. In this regard, we commend the role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, its Multinational Specialized Unit and the international police transition force for their role. Democratization and reconciliation are indispensable elements in consolidating peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Reconciliation, however, does not mean impunity. In fact, there will be no reconciliation until all war criminals are brought to justice. To this end, we expect the cooperation of all countries concerned.

The situation in Kosovo has been giving rise to legitimate international concerns for quite some time now. Serious violations of human rights have been reported for years. In recent months the population of Kosovo has been subjected to a campaign of terror and forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in the woods and mountains. The international community should prevent humanitarian catastrophe this winter and force all the parties in the conflict to face their responsibilities. All forms of violence against the civilian population in Kosovo must stop. The Kosovo population needs a ceasefire and needs negotiations to start now. This is a prerequisite for the process of the return of refugees to start.

The United Nations has the means to organize an effective international action for the maintenance of peace. The Security Council is addressing most of these problems. At the moment, Slovenia is proud to be a non-permanent member of the Security Council. We are doing our best to contribute to the common effort to ensure that peace is maintained, international obligations respected, justice done and innocent lives saved wherever and whenever possible.

Slovenian armed forces already participate in actions to consolidate peace, security and stability. The conduct of peace-support operations is an expression of Slovenia's political will and a reflection of the readiness of our armed forces.

The wealth of experience the United Nations has accumulated is impressive. However, in many ways reform of its 50-year-old structure would greatly enhance its effectiveness. Slovenia shares the view of the majority of Member States that the Security Council also needs to be and should be reformed. It should become more representative and more up to date by expanding the number of its non-permanent as well as permanent members. It should become more effective in its decision-making. Last but not least, it should become more transparent, for its decisions affect all the Member States.

This year's session of the General Assembly will be marked significantly by the commemoration of an important event, which continues to be an important source of inspiration for United Nations activities today. Fifty years have passed since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a historic document that recognized the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

This is an appropriate time to reflect on what has already been achieved and what still remains to be done in the field of human rights. This is the time to reconfirm our commitment and show our determination to promote and protect the whole spectrum of human rights — civil and political, as well as economic, social and cultural.

We believe strongly that the promotion and protection of human rights is a legitimate concern of the international community and calls for a high level of international attention and cooperation. Slovenia strongly supports the work of the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda and is pleased to see the first ever verdict on the crime of genocide handed down by an international criminal court. We also see this as the most gratifying way to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

The successful completion of the United Nations Diplomatic Conference on the establishment of an International Criminal Court on 17 July of this year is a historic step towards making the rule of law and human rights truly universal. We hope that this will help provide justice for victims, limit impunity and deter acts of

genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in the next century.

The signing of the Ottawa Convention was an important step forward towards the total ban of anti-personnel landmines. We all have to start a global process of demining and mine clearance operations in thousands of mined areas all over the world. At the same time, the process of the physical and mental rehabilitation of millions of mine victims throughout the world should start as soon as possible. Slovenia has already joined this process. The Government of the Republic of Slovenia established the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The main purpose of the Fund is to raise financial resources and organize demining operations and a programme of rehabilitation for mine victims from Bosnia and Herzegovina. I would like to take this opportunity to invite other countries to join us in this noble effort.

At the end of the cold war, many countries anticipated the end of the nuclear era. We were expecting an accelerated process of elimination of nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, and notwithstanding important successes in the reduction of nuclear arms, the proliferation of nuclear weapons has increased in recent years. Slovenia strongly deplores nuclear tests and appeals to all countries to end their military nuclear programmes.

Slovenia demonstrated its determination to contribute to nuclear disarmament by joining seven other non-nuclear countries — Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, and Sweden — in launching the joint declaration of eight Ministers for Foreign Affairs entitled "Towards a nuclear-weapon-free world: the need for a new agenda" [A/53/138]. The prime goal of our action was to start new efforts for nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament. We, the representatives of eight countries, are firm in our efforts to enable forthcoming generations to enjoy a world free of nuclear weapons.

This is the time for concrete action and visionary initiatives. The evolution of the international system requires both. Slovenia is aware of this important need. We believe that such basic issues of international security as the issue of nuclear arms need to be addressed in a realistic and comprehensive manner.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Janez Drnovsek, Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Bahamas, Her Excellency the Honourable Janet Bostwick.

Mrs. Bostwick (Bahamas): I wish to express the pleasure of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas at having Mr. Opertti preside over the deliberations of this fifty-third session of the General Assembly and to convey to him our warmest congratulations on his election. He may count on the full support of the Bahamas delegation to ensure the success of this session.

The Bahamas also wishes to express its appreciation to Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko of Ukraine, whose competent leadership brought the deliberations of the fifty-second session to a successful conclusion. He has our gratitude.

On 10 July of this year, the Commonwealth of the Bahamas celebrated its silver jubilee anniversary as a sovereign nation. Our country is a thriving democracy and enjoys one of the highest standards of living in our hemisphere. Our economy continues its rebound from negative growth early in the decade, and increasingly we are creating the jobs necessary to provide productive employment for our young population in all sectors of the Bahamian economy.

Over the past 25 years, the Bahamas has demonstrated a consistently strong and exemplary record in upholding democracy, protecting and promoting human rights, promoting the advancement of women and promoting social development and justice.

As a member of the community of nations, the Bahamas has remained firm in its commitments to the United Nations and to other international organizations. Hence, the foreign policy of the Bahamas has been marked by peaceful cooperation and respect for the sovereignty of its neighbours.

Nevertheless, we, like many others in the international community, are constrained to question the adequacy of delivery on commitments to improve the circumstances of developing countries. I believe it is fair to assert that the United Nations record of achievement in developing countries has been, at best, mixed.

While it is true that many developing countries have gained a measure of success in their economic and social

sectors as a direct result of United Nations intervention and assistance, too often such successes have been overshadowed and continue to be overshadowed by serious deficiencies. Too many countries in the developing world today suffer from abject poverty, deteriorating environments, poor health standards, high unemployment rates, staggering levels of malnutrition and hunger, spiralling inflation, growing criminal activity and masses of homeless persons displaced by political and economic conditions. Such problems and challenges defy the meagre resources, both human and financial, of these nations, and many assistance programmes mounted to redress them are limited by their decreasing resources.

These are some of the critical areas where the Organization can make a difference in the lives of individuals, especially in developing countries. Another area where the Organization could make a difference would be in the adoption of measures to eradicate the abhorrent practice of trafficking in women and children. We call upon the international community to make every effort to address this problem in a comprehensive manner.

The Bahamas continues to be challenged by the uncontrolled entry of economic migrants to its territory, a struggle which receives scant international recognition or assistance, notwithstanding the considerable financial burden foisted upon our small developing State. Indeed, undue pressure is frequently brought to bear upon our small society to absorb such economic refugees without regard for the serious social and political consequences of such requests. It is clear that the important United Nations conventions crafted to address the problems of political refugees following the Second World War do not adequately address the problem of today's undocumented economic migrants. We call on this Assembly, therefore, to begin to address the need for a review of the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The Bahamas is an archipelago of some 700 islands stretched over some 80,000 square miles of ocean. We are home to one of the most important coral reef systems in the world and of important species of flora, fauna and animal life, both terrestrial and marine. Our responsibility to conserve and protect our environment for the welfare of future generations is clear. Equally clear is the fact that we require continued international assistance if we are to succeed. In this regard, I wish to acknowledge and thank the United Nations Environment Programme (UNDP) for its continuing assistance to the Bahamas as we seek to enhance our capacity to catalogue, manage and protect our rich biodiversity; and to thank also the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change for its assistance in improving our response to the challenges created by climate change and sea level rise.

It is important that we begin to deal forthrightly with the obstacles which impede the United Nations from playing as effective a role as it ought, or might, in the global economy. We must be vigilant against slippage in our commitment to the goals of the Organization so eloquently embodied in our fiftieth anniversary pledge to be a people "united for a better world" in which the human condition remained our highest priority. We must all accept that the United Nations can only be, and will only be, as successful and responsive as we the Member States allow it to be. The United Nations success is our success.

The reform measures adopted last session provide a useful platform from which to refocus and improve our Organization. In this regard, the Bahamas welcomes the proposals for both a Millennium Assembly and a Millennium Forum, so as to forge a closer partnership with civil society.

The Bahamas also recognizes and accepts the appropriateness of adopting sunset clauses, establishing time limits for United Nations mandates. Given the sensitivity of the matter, however, we strongly recommend that final decisions be arrived at on the basis of consensus among the Organization's membership.

The Bahamas believes that the Security Council as currently composed reflects some inequities and imbalances of this Organization. A living organization must adapt to changing circumstances if it is to remain relevant. A Security Council reflecting the eminence of post-Second World War Powers cannot be expected to adequately address concerns of our post-colonial world. As we approach a new millennium, it would be in our interest for this central organ of our Organization to be more reflective of our present reality.

As a peace-loving nation, and one in which respect for human dignity has historically been upheld, the Bahamas condemns terrorism in all its forms. Such wanton acts are inhumane and wreak havoc on entire communities. It is for these reasons that the Bahamas will continue to lend its support to all legitimate national and international efforts to stem the spread of terrorism and to work towards its elimination.

To this end, we will continue to cooperate with the international community to bring the perpetrators of terrorism to justice, as well as to address comprehensively the root causes of terrorism. We call on all Members to act similarly.

We wish to thank Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his untiring efforts in the promotion of international peace and security. Unfortunately, his recent reports on trouble spots around the world continue to reveal a disturbing picture. In a world shrunken by globalization, every trouble spot has the potential to affect us all. Our energies, exerted in search of real solutions to these global crises, must therefore match those expended in pursuit of responses to our national challenges. Let us seek to mark the fiftieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping with an enlightened breakthrough in this area.

The continued production and use of land mines internationally continues to maim and kill thousands of innocent men, women and children in developing countries. The Bahamas abhors these actions. We were pleased to join the more than 100 countries which have signed the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, which we have also now ratified. We call upon all Member States that have not done so, to do the same.

The Bahamas is seriously concerned by the proliferation of handguns and other weapons which continue to infiltrate small island developing States. The use of these conventional weapons by perpetrators of crime considerably raises the level of violence in our societies and threatens our social, economic and political fibre.

We call on countries manufacturing handgun and other weapons to assume greater responsibility over the sale and export of such weapons, and to strengthen their international collaborative efforts to combat this problem. For our part, we have joined Member States of this hemisphere in acceding to and ratifying the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and Other Related Materials. We commend similar action to all Member States of this body.

The Bahamas, after experiencing an abatement in the illicit transit and traffic in narcotic drugs through its territory, regrets to inform the Assembly that it is again confronted with this scourge. Drug seizure quantity and frequency have increased, and the numbers of persons arrested and charged with drug offences are similarly increasing. Past experience has taught us that this is not a problem which can be resolved by any single State. International cooperation is critical if this menace is to be controlled.

Notably, we welcomed the recent twentieth special session of the General Assembly on the world's drug problem. That session adopted important decisions designed to chart the future course in the international fight to combat the supply, traffic and consumption of illicit drugs. It is now imperative that Member States commit themselves to the implementation of those decisions.

The past 12 months have been a period of turmoil for the world's economy, marked in particular by the crippling financial crisis in South-East Asia. The fallout from that crisis is now being felt, in varying degrees, globally.

We have, from time to time, in this forum underscored the importance of establishing a sustainable and equitable international framework for highly integrated global markets. This need remains critical, particularly in the light of the quickening pace of the globalization of production and of capital flows, and the liberalization of trade since early in this decade. Clearly, these developments have not provided equal opportunities for all countries to share in the benefits of globalization.

Countries — developing countries, least developed countries and countries with economies in transition — ought to be assisted in their efforts to become integrated into the mainstream global economy, without incurring disruptive and punitive economic, social and cultural costs. These are matters of survival for small economies like that of the Bahamas.

Questions are now being raised concerning the adequacy of the international financial system to meet the growing demands of the world's diverse economies. My Government is acutely aware that, while private capital flows have played an indispensable role in the advancement of developing economies, they should not be relied upon as the single source of financing for capital development. In this connection, the Bahamas notes the recent call for a high-level international intergovernmental forum on financing for development aimed at furthering the global partnership for development.

My Government supports this call and applauds the Assembly's efforts to explore the matter further by soliciting input from Member States. We call on this body to address the issue in as comprehensive and integrated a manner as possible.

My Government was also pleased to note the convening, in December last, of the expert group meeting on vulnerability indices here at the United Nations. It is my Government's fervent hope that work will continue in this important area. As the Assembly is aware, the Bahamas has on many occasions repeated its objection to the use of per capita income as the sole, or principal, measuring tool for the economies of developing countries. This yardstick does not, and cannot, take into account the special circumstances of countries like the Bahamas, with our archipelagic make-up, our ecological fragility and our economic vulnerability. Yet these are all integral measures of our state of development.

My Government looks forward to the upcoming review in 1999 of the Barbados Programme of Action, and hopes that all issues of concern to small island developing States will be addressed in line with the chapters of the Programme of Action.

The vision of our United Nations to meet the needs of our people is achievable, but only if our purposes and principles are designed for the common good rather than for narrow nationalistic objectives. Otherwise, such motives will inevitably produce inadequate programmes and adversely affect relationships.

The lessons of history no longer take centuries to be deduced. They present themselves starkly before us, often in our own lifetime. Will we choose to learn from them? The answer lies with each of us.

The Acting President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Myanmar, His Excellency Mr. Ohn Gyaw, on whom I now call.

Mr. Gyaw (Myanmar): At the outset, Sir, let me extend to Mr. Opertti the felicitations of my delegation on his unanimous election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. We are confident that under his experienced leadership we will be able to achieve substantive progress in the deliberations of this Assembly.

I should also like to take this opportunity to pay a well-deserved tribute to his predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, who presided over one of the most eventful sessions of the General Assembly. In particular, I would like to express our gratitude for his skilful stewardship of our deliberations on the reform package of the Secretary-General, which led to the successful completion of an important phase in the United Nations reform process.

Last year the Secretary-General presented us with his most comprehensive and far-reaching proposals for the strengthening and reinvigoration of this Organization. We were also able to adopt two landmark resolutions, 52/12 A and 52/12 B, during the substantive part of the fifty-second session to enable us to reform this Organization and to introduce new mechanisms, including the Office of Deputy Secretary-General, to improve its performance. With these new mechanisms, the Organization has been able to renew the emphasis on economic, social and development activities. We are pleased that we have Ms. Fréchette, an outstanding person with vast experience, as the first Deputy Secretary-General of the Organization.

Early this year we were able to take further steps to move forward the reform process, a process that is still continuing. We would like to thank the Secretary-General for his timely submission of reports and additional explanations in response to resolution 52/12 B. We hope that the untiring efforts of the Secretary-General will push forward the ongoing process.

As a developing nation, we hope that the reform process will strengthen the ability of the United Nations to fulfil its role and functions in the field of development and to respond effectively to the development needs of the developing countries. In this respect, the establishment of a Development Account under the reform process is a welcome step.

Forward movement in the overall reform of the United Nations is not matched by similar progress in the reform of the Security Council. We are somewhat disheartened over the lack of tangible results on the core issues in the deliberations of the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Security Council. I am sure that every State Member of this Organization shares the view that the reform of the Security Council is one of the most crucial aspects of the entire United Nations reform process. This process will be considered by the world community as seriously inadequate, and much less genuine, if we fail to produce a Security Council that is truly representative of the present membership of this

Organization and can effectively respond to future challenges. We do not believe that a body that is not democratic and representative can really look after the interests of the broad membership in its cardinal task of maintaining international peace and security.

We all have been engaged in in-depth and intensive discussions of the various aspects of the Security Council reform for almost five years now. Although we had had high hopes that the latest rounds of discussions of the Working Group would produce general agreement on the more contentious issues related to the Security Council, the desired goal remains elusive. We nevertheless are gratified to note that the Working Group has made encouraging headway in its deliberations on measures conducive to improving the working methods and transparency of the Council's activities. We believe that expansion of the Security Council in a balanced manner is one of the main elements of Security Council reform. We are discouraged by the fact that it is on this core element that substantive differences among the delegations still remain. These fundamental differences have proved to be a major obstacle to our forward movement towards a general agreement on a common package.

As a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, we in general subscribe to the common position of the Movement on Security Council reform. However, we wish to make some observations on certain core issues on which we feel we should register our position.

First of all, my delegation wishes to emphasize that the objective of the entire process of Security Council reform is not the mere addition of a couple of countries to its permanent membership. Although it has been accepted in principle that three permanent seats should be allotted to developing countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America, the mode of their identification and selection, despite various suggestions and concepts on the table, seems intractable at this juncture and remains unsettled. Myanmar would view with concern any move or measure biased towards particular candidates. Myanmar believes that countries which are capable of contributing to international peace and security should be permanent members in the expanded Council. We also favour the expansion of the Security Council in both permanent and non-permanent memberships.

We are now being provided with an historic opportunity to devise ways of selecting new permanent members for the Security Council.

Although there has been noticeably strong support for expansion of the Security Council in its permanent category, we have not been able to translate various ideas on this question into a viable formula acceptable to all. In this connection, the idea of rotating new permanent members, which the Organization of African Unity has decided to apply to the African countries, is a very significant concept. There appear to be a growing number of States attracted to it, and Myanmar is one of those countries. This is a concept submitted by a particular region for itself and not meant for export to other regions. Nevertheless, we should not rule out the concept as one of the possible options applicable to other regions such as Asia, in the event that other modalities of selection or options fail to command enough support. It is vitally important that expansion of the Security Council in both categories of membership take place simultaneously for all regions.

Myanmar is one of the 74 members of the Organization which has never been a member of the Security Council. However deficient in its present structure and undemocratic in its practice the Security Council may be, its role in the maintenance of international peace and security and the contribution made by its members are highly appreciated by the Union of Myanmar. Myanmar has therefore always given serious attention to the annual election of five non-permanent members of the Security Council.

At the same time, to enhance the role of non-permanent members, now generally looked upon as peripheral, we could seek a solution by improving the working methods of the Security Council.

Inextricably linked to the expansion of the permanent membership of the Security Council is the veto. Debate on this question has been continuing both outside and inside the Organization since before the founding of the United Nations. Nevertheless, little has been done in the years since then to rectify its injustice. Given the present state of the discussions, the question promises to haunt us in the future, regardless of how strongly we may feel about the practice. While a large majority of Member States are demanding its curtailment and eventual elimination, permanent members continue to be entrenched in their position that they cannot accept any diminution of their rights and prerogatives, including the veto.

In the context of extending the veto to new permanent members, two main views have emerged. One

view argues for its extension to new permanent members. In their opinion, the new members will be inferior without the veto. The other view states that the enjoyment of the veto, as now constituted, by the new permanent members would entail setbacks. Therefore, to limit the veto in scope and application for the moment with a view to its eventual abolishment is, in their view, necessary. In this connection, there have been many sensible suggestions to curtail the veto's scope and application. They are very interesting indeed. The most sensible of them, in our view, is the idea of curtailing its application to issues that fall under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. In fact, the provisions of Chapter VII are the rationale of the Security Council.

Myanmar has consistently held the view that the veto is unjust and anachronistic and that its ultimate elimination is the most logical conclusion. However, we accept that it is unrealistic to eliminate the veto at present. We therefore consider it unfair and discriminatory to deny the veto to new permanent members until we can seal the fate of this unwanted relic of the past. We strongly feel that new members should be endowed with the same rights and prerogatives now enjoyed by the current permanent members.

I have dealt at some length with the United Nations reform process. I have done so because the effective functioning of the United Nations in fulfilling its role and objectives is of critical importance to developing countries like mine. It is here at the United Nations that developing countries have sovereign equality with big and powerful countries. It is here at the United Nations that we have to maintain and safeguard time-bound principles such as settling international disputes by peaceful means; refraining in international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State; and refraining from intervention in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State.

These are principles that are of the utmost importance to developing countries like Myanmar so that they can have independence not only in name but also in reality. Only a United Nations that is genuinely democratic will ensure that these principles are neither diluted nor made flexible to serve the domestic political needs of big and powerful nations. In the age of a single super-Power, we are witnessing too often attempts to use the United Nations as a political tool of the big and powerful nations.

Too often we are seeing the will of the international community become synonymous with that of the single most powerful nation or a group of powerful nations. Only a United Nations that is genuinely representative can look after not only the interest of big and powerful nations but also the interest of the whole United Nations membership, including the weakest among them. That is why we place so much importance on the United Nations reform process.

We had high hopes that the end of the cold war would usher in a new international order. We had high hopes that resources used for the arms race could be diverted to development activities. We had hoped for peace and tranquillity to prevail worldwide. Instead we see instability and conflict in most regions of the world — the crisis in the Middle East, the tragedy in Bosnia, in Kosovo, in Angola, in the Sudan and in Afghanistan, to cite just a few. In many of these situations, the United Nations had to spend millions and millions of dollars in its peacekeeping efforts. This has caused a serious drain on the resources of the Organization, whose finances were already in dire circumstances mainly because of a single Member that had withheld its contributions for domestic political reasons.

It would be a truism to say that the United Nations and its operations are overstretched. Much of its resources have been diverted from development activities, expenditures that could be put to more useful purposes for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples.

In spite of this situation, there are those who would like to use the United Nations to interfere in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of Myanmar. The present Government assumed State responsibility to restore stability and normalcy to the country when it was in a state of chaos and anarchy. In the last few years the Government has restored stability to the country. The insurgency, which has burdened the country for the last 50 years, is now almost a thing of the past. Peace and tranquillity prevail throughout nearly the whole country. These are hard-earned achievements, especially for a multi-ethnic nation such as Myanmar.

We have attained stability in Myanmar through our own endeavours. We have not imposed any burden on the international community. We are therefore very much distressed that there are those who would like to use the United Nations to intervene in matters that are essentially within our domestic jurisdiction. It was the General Assembly itself which adopted numerous resolutions,

including the resolution on the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States, which reaffirms the sovereign and inalienable right of each and every State to choose its economic and political systems. We in Myanmar have chosen the path of democracy.

It is also an irony that at a time when Myanmar has openly and repeatedly declared that it is now in the process of building a genuine democratic State with a market-oriented economic system, political pressure has been put on us by those who not only would like us to adopt democracy but would also like to transplant a democracy according to their own mould. It is unfortunate that these proponents of a particular type of democracy would like to use the United Nations to interfere in our domestic political process. We in Myanmar strongly believe that the path we have chosen is the right one and is the most suitable to our tradition, to our culture, to our national ethos and, most importantly, to the aspirations of our people. We shall resolutely continue our endeavours to build a modern, democratic, peaceful and prosperous nation in Myanmar.

Nevertheless, there are some who entertain concerns that difficulties relating to human rights practices in one country could create economic problems in another. In fact, such transborder human movements occurred among neighbouring countries in the past for various reasons. The important aspect is that there must be the will to resolve and overcome such difficulties through mutual understanding and respect. The idea of relying on others to resolve our own domestic problems should be discouraged.

We still live in an unsettled post-cold-war period where pockets of rising tensions still exist. We are also confronted with a vast array of major problems awaiting solutions. Since we last met, we have witnessed developments that give cause for hope as well as for deep concern. As the only multilateral forum to deal with the problems of peace and development, the enhanced role of the United Nations is now more necessary than ever. We all have trust in the Organization's capability to avert catastrophes of all kinds and to find global solutions to the major problems of the world. We also have trust in our capacity to work together. It is imperative to redouble our concerted efforts if we are to be successful in the creation of a peaceful and prosperous world order. In this common task, Myanmar pledges, as a responsible Member of the United Nations, to continue its strong support for the endeavours of the Organization to promote the economic and social advancement of mankind and reaffirms its commitments to the purposes and principles of the Charter.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Communities of Cape Verde, His Excellency Mr. José Luis Jesus.

Mr. Jesus (Cape Verde): I take particular pleasure in extending to Mr. Didier Opertti and to his country, Uruguay, my congratulations on his election to preside over the work of this session of the General Assembly. His eminent qualities, as well as his diplomatic experience, will undoubtedly ensure the success of our work.

I also express my deep appreciation for the wise leadership his predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, imprinted on the work of the fifty-second session, thus contributing to the positive results achieved.

My country appreciates highly the creativity and the intellectual energy brought to United Nations affairs by Secretary-General Kofi Annan since he took over, and we particularly appreciate his efforts to streamline United Nations structures.

My Government fully supported the United Nations programme of reforms aimed at conferring more coherence and efficiency on the activities of the United Nations. We have no doubt that the streamlining of the United Nations administration will have a positive impact on the way the Organization handles the various and complex issues confronting the international community.

The efforts made over recent years by the international community, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the African subregional organizations and by States individually to deal with the conflicts in the African continent have produced some positive results, some of them remarkable. This has contributed to the restoration of peace and the return to normalcy in several of the affected countries. However, the resurgence of new conflicts and the reappearance of other conflicts which we believed had already been resolved raise serious concerns, particularly because of the threat they pose to peace and stability even beyond national borders. This situation raises the spectre of disastrous consequences for the populations' well-being and security and casts a shadow over the much-needed economic and social development of the affected countries.

A strong commitment is required on the part of the international community to find ways and means to deal effectively with the armed conflicts in the African continent. In Africa, as in any other region of the world,

internal conflicts arise whenever individuals or groups of people have no channels through which they can funnel their legitimate claims through peacefully and democratically. In the end, the non-existence of dialogue, the practice of intolerance and the absence of reliable judicial means to deal with divergences are the shortest path to armed conflict.

In his recent report to the Security Council on this matter, the Secretary-General made a substantial contribution to the understanding of the causes of conflict in our continent and their relationship to development, good governance, democracy and human rights.

Maintaining peace in fact becomes a difficult task when we witness the deepening of social gaps; while the overwhelming majority of the population has difficulty obtaining the essentials; when fundamental rights of populations or parts of them, including the right to participate in the governance of their country, are not recognized or respected; or when citizens or groups of citizens are discriminated against on the basis of ethnic, cultural, religious or political considerations.

This situation is compounded by the temptation of outside interference aimed at imposing policies or exerting influence on Governments — most of the time causing or aggravating conflict situations.

The virus of violence and conflicts that plagues African regions and countries thrives in the precarious living conditions of millions of Africans and the non-recognition in practice of the most fundamental rights of citizenship. Whenever one faces rampant famine, illiteracy, ignorance, illness and oppression, whenever human dignity is not secured by the lofty ideals of full-fledged democracy, or whenever the respect for human rights is not widely upheld, then peace, stability and progress are in question.

It is evident that if one wants to reduce the occurrence of armed conflicts it is imperative to uphold respect for the fundamental rights of citizenship, tolerance and social justice and to support the creation of better living conditions that comes with economic development.

The United Nations, as the main guarantor of peace in the world, has a major role to play in the mobilization of the resources and political will needed to confront African countries' colossal needs and overcome the prevalent situation of underdevelopment and intolerance, which in the end favour the occurrence or persistence of armed conflicts.

However, it must be recognized that it is up to African States, their leaders — especially those that hold the reins of power — and their respective civil societies to assume courageously their responsibilities, particularly in respect of the promotion of the sound and fair management of their resources, the consolidation of democratic institutions, the observation of and respect for the rights of citizenship and the creation of a climate of tolerance and respect for the dignity and liberty of the human person.

The sisterly country of Guinea-Bissau has gone through a difficult period in her history over the last two months, as it has been faced with an internal armed conflict. My country, which together with the other Portuguese-speaking countries shares with Guinea-Bissau a long common history, has been following with particular attention the situation unfolding in that sisterly country and has not spared any effort in contributing to the search for a political and negotiated solution to the crisis.

In the framework of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) Contact Group, which we have the honour to be coordinating, we will continue to give our best efforts to support a peaceful resolution of the crisis, and we hope that the joint mediation initiative of the CPLP and the Economic Community of West African States will come to play an efficient and decisive role in the ongoing peace process.

We hope that the parties to the conflict will continue to strictly observe the ceasefire agreement signed at Praia on 25 August and will also continue to show tolerance to enable Guinea-Bissau society to be reconciled soon.

The difficult situation prevailing in Angola, a country to which we are bound by profound brotherly ties and a long common history, demands a strong and decisive commitment on the part of the international community in order to restore as soon as possible compliance with the obligations entered into in the framework of the Lusaka Protocol, while bearing in mind the relevant Security Council resolutions. Of particular concern to my country is the spectre of new armed confrontations in Angola, raised by UNITA's regrettable defiance. The brotherly people of Angola, who for many years have been victimized by the prevailing situation of war, have the right to peace, political stability and a much-needed national reconciliation.

The current international financial crisis that recently shook the economies of many countries, especially in Asia, seems to raise increasing concerns for all of us. It raises doubts about prospects for continuing the global prosperity which, fuelled by economic growth, once seemed so long-lasting. The former optimistic outlook has lately been called into question, especially in respect to developing nations, by a series of financial setbacks that pose a threat to social stability, cohesion and peace in the affected countries.

The rapid degradation of economies considered to be healthy and in full expansion only months ago has been the object of the special attention and concern of many that have spoken from this rostrum in the last few days. The fear and apprehensions that the stability of many States may be affected negatively by the fallout resulting from the dynamics of globalization raise justifiable concern, particularly about the speculative attacks against the economies of certain developing nations or the maintenance of not so transparent management practices.

At question is the equilibrium of the world economy, the disturbance of which may have disastrous consequences — economic and otherwise — for all of us. The ongoing democratization process taking place at different rhythms in different countries could fall prey to this situation. It could also lead to social and political instability and give rise to risks to peace and security. It is illusory to believe that the negative impact of such an economic situation could be contained within the boundaries of developing nations, since the phenomenon of globalization seems to have created its own dynamics and knows no boundaries.

The destinies of our countries, large and small alike, industrialized or developing, are increasingly interlinked. Therefore, it is imperative that collectively we find effective solutions that facilitate the end of the crisis, promote growth on a global scale and secure a sustainable rhythm of social and economic development.

As a country severely affected by drought and desertification, Cape Verde pays special attention to the environment.

The environmental issues confronting mankind, as well as of the relationship between man and nature, make it incumbent upon us to act in a swift, efficient and global manner so as to guarantee the preservation of the basic conditions that make life possible on Earth. Our primary task should be to find a global strategy that will maintain the balance of our ecosystems and at the same time secure the betterment of living conditions for the world's population.

However, this is easier said than done. Cape Verde shares the view that, in order for us to confront the problem of environmental degradation, we should take a new approach to the dynamics of economic and social development, an approach that focuses on the eradication of poverty. Until this is done, not much can be achieved in this regard, at least not in the developing countries.

Against this background, my Government has been enacting various pieces of legislation to bring the issue of the environment into its legal mainstream. However, whatever legislative measures we and other developing countries may enact, in order to reap the expected environmental benefits, resources should be made available by the international community to allow developing nations to build their capacity to implement their own environmental programmes in a sustained manner.

The end of the cold war seemed to have created a new dynamic for the issue of poverty through the Agenda for Development. Awareness of this issue seems to have been strengthened, since we cannot remain indifferent to the extreme poverty that severely afflicts more than a quarter of the planet's inhabitants. The spirit of solidarity that guided the Copenhagen Summit must today be reflected in a gamut of concrete actions aimed at supporting the huge efforts of developing countries in their struggle against poverty, the creation of conditions for sustainable development and, consequently, the general improvement of people's living conditions.

Cape Verde, within the framework of the engagement undertaken at that Summit, has been adopting the necessary measures to combat poverty in the country. Nevertheless, like other developing nations, especially those on the list of least developed countries, we find that our internal efforts will not produce the expected results without additional measures on the part of the international community. We believe that the special follow-up meeting to take place in the year 2000 should be the occasion for a thorough assessment of the situation and for the launching of concrete action targeted at the effective implementation of the engagements undertaken at the Copenhagen Conference.

By the same token, I cannot but emphasize the issue of small island States, which, as is known, have special

challenges and vulnerabilities, a global assessment of which will be made next year, in keeping with the Barbados Programme of Action. It is expected that the international community will commit itself to concrete measures with a view to implementing the engagements undertaken under that Programme, which is of particular importance for the sustained development of the small island States.

As we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the international community should seize the occasion to make a detailed assessment of the global performance in protecting and realizing all the rights of the human person. To this end, an assessment of the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action over the last five years would contribute much.

It should be borne in mind that the protection and promotion of all human rights constitutes a major challenge to mankind as we approach the next millennium. Regrettably, throughout the world, political, ethnic or religious intolerance, as well as armed conflicts, have brought untold misery to millions of people whose fundamental rights have been violated, including the fundamental right to life. Special emphasis, in this regard, should be put on the right to development, a fundamental human right which, by its very nature, conditions the degree and the *modus* of realization of the other human rights — political, civil, social, cultural and economic rights.

Much talk has been heard on the issue of human rights. It is not enough, however, to proclaim such rights or to brag about them without at the same time ensuring the conditions, including the economic conditions, for their effective implementation, a task that especially requires action on the part of the United Nations system and the international community in general.

The people of East Timor are still deprived of their fundamental rights, especially the inalienable right to dispose of their own destiny. Cape Verde, in keeping with the United Nations principles it has always upheld, once again emphasizes the need for the observance of and respect for the right of self-determination of the East Timorese people, and encourages the efforts undertaken by the international community, under the authority of the Secretary-General, with a view to protecting and promoting human rights in that territory, and finding a lasting solution that is acceptable.

As we approach the next millennium, our countries are faced with daunting challenges, and the Organization, which has unequivocally scored some successes, should be capable of coping with a rejuvenated role, one which should be increasingly more humane and reflecting more solidarity, aimed at the effective implementation of the lofty ideals that are its foundation.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency The Honourable Allan Cruickshank, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tourism and Information of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Mr. Cruickshank (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): On behalf of the delegation of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, I extend my warmest congratulations to Mr. Didier Opertti on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. His acumen, scholarship and leadership skills are well known in our region through his distinguished participation in various high-level hemispheric forums over the years.

I also wish to express my delegation's sincere appreciation to his predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko of the Ukraine, who presided over the work of the fifty-second session with great distinction.

Our esteemed Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, has continued to provide outstanding leadership in the discharge of his duties. My delegation commends the Secretary-General for his reform initiatives designed to make the United Nations a more efficient organization, capable of responding to the many challenges it faces, and for his untiring efforts in the pursuit of world peace and security, long-lasting prosperity and international cooperation. Our own University of the West Indies, acting on behalf of the region, has honoured him appropriately for his work in this regard.

Since the signing of the Charter some 53 years ago, the world can celebrate numerous progressive changes in which the United Nations has played a significant part. United Nations peacekeepers have been instrumental in preserving peace and stability in troubled areas of the globe, and the Organization's humanitarian missions have been effective in alleviating suffering among many people throughout the world.

At the same time, there remains a massive gap between aspiration and accomplishment. Despite the unprecedented prosperity that technological advances and

the globalization of production and finance have brought to many countries, especially in the developed world, the majority of mankind is yet under the yoke of persistent poverty.

The eradication of poverty remains a priority for developing countries. The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is committed to the uplifting of the lot of the poor and disadvantaged sections of our society. In this regard, my Government's specific policy and programme objectives over the medium and long term are designed to promote sustained economic growth and development in ways that expand employment, raise incomes, improve living standards, increase productive capacity and reduce poverty. We therefore call for the creation of a supportive international environment. We also call on the developed countries to fulfil the commitments undertaken for the provision of additional financial resources in combating world poverty, that social malignancy which is seminal many of the other problems that plague developing countries.

It would be remiss of me not to take this opportunity to thank the European Union for its unwavering support and most recent decision on the banana regime for African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, within the framework of the Lomé Convention on economic cooperation, trade and development. The new arrangements are compatible with the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO), and will allow this important regional industry to achieve a sustainable level of growth. These new arrangements also create an appropriate environment for the survival of a restructured and competitive banana industry. It is therefore quite alarming to learn that the United States of America and some of our hemispheric friends in Latin America are about to challenge the new arrangements.

Such actions force us to revisit the Charters of regional and international organizations of which we are a part and question the efficaciousness of our membership. These incomprehensible stratagems on the part of friendly countries nurture a pervasive cynicism among our peoples, who chastise Governments for cooperating with those who say one thing and then act in a totally contrary manner that is injurious to our best interests.

My delegation is amazed by the blind and apathetic position of the United States of America on the issue. We are told that no harm is meant to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and other Caribbean banana-producing countries, while efforts are made to undermine our social stability, which is facilitated by the export of our bananas under the provisions of the Lomé Convention.

Mr. Mangoaela (Lesotho), Vice-President, took the Chair.

How can we convince our citizens of the need to combat the production, use and trade in illicit drugs if our banana industry is destroyed? Is it really possible that our friends, especially the United States, want to see the proliferation of instability, insecurity and extreme poverty in a region which has made steady socio-economic progress since the widespread social turbulence of the 1930s?

In spite of the special difficulties faced by small island developing countries like Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, we are meeting all our international obligations and have acceded to several bilateral and multilateral programmes on the eradication of illicit drugs. We have the will to fight this scourge in the international community, but friendly nations should also understand our vulnerabilities.

My Government is scrupulously committed to the defense and enhancement of the democratic process which has emerged in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and other countries of the Caribbean Community since the mid-1940s with the attainment of universal adult suffrage. Our democracies are based on respect for human rights, on recognition, in policy and practice, that the distribution of national resources is disparate and that all our people aspire to a decent standard of living, on the creation of economic and other opportunities for personal development and on the observance of free and fair elections under our Constitution.

After the fourth consecutive election victory of 15 June 1998, the New Democratic Party (NDP) Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, under the pragmatic and visionary leadership of the Rt. Honourable Sir James F. Mitchell, reiterates its commitment to these principles, as we join with the international community in building a better life for our people in the twenty-first century.

My delegation strongly condemns the recent acts of terrorism which occurred in Kenya, Tanzania, Northern Ireland and Cape Town, South Africa. Violence should never be the way to settle disputes. The deaths of so many innocent people in such outrageous acts can never be justified. My delegation therefore urges that all parties

involved must review their policies, settle their disputes peacefully and use reason instead of the bomb. My Government fully supports the Good Friday Agreement brokered by the United States in Northern Ireland. It provides an acceptable framework for the resolution of deep-seated, historic differences in that part of the world.

My delegation is very concerned about the illicit transfer and proliferation of small arms and light weapons and their accumulation in many countries. These activities constitute a real threat to national and regional security and can contribute to the destabilization of States. We urge Member States to cooperate in taking steps to deal effectively with this increasing problem. My country was pleased to sign the Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Production and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and Other Related Materials, at the Organization of American States in November 1997. My Government wishes to express its appreciation for the adoption in 1996, by the Disarmament Commission, of guidelines in resolution 46/36 H of 6 December 1991. However, we feel that there is need for greater urgency in advancing initiatives to deal with this issue at a global level.

The end of the cold war rekindled aspirations for lasting peace and prosperity. The dismantling of the Berlin Wall heightened expectations for a peace dividend. Unfortunately, the United Nations has to continue utilizing most of its resources in managing or containing conflicts of varying origins and intensity in many parts of the world. The role of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security has become even more relevant than before. The situations in Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Great Lakes region, the Western Sahara and the Middle East, among many others countries, continue to occupy the attention of this Organization.

We are dismayed that, in spite of the end of cold-war rivalry, the unfortunate people of Cyprus must continue to accommodate the division imposed on their country.

As we approach the new millennium, our world is still threatened by the existence of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction and the potential for their further proliferation. The time has come for all countries to commit themselves to the goal of complete eradication of weapons of mass destruction. I call for universal support for the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. The Convention is clear on the total ban on anti-personnel mines, which have taken the lives of so many innocent civilians, mostly women and children.

In the nation-States of the Caribbean Community, the dawn of a new millennium challenges us to assert our independence and demonstrate our maturity by crafting creative constitutional arrangements, suited to our particular historical, cultural and political evolution. We have come thus far with constitutions moulded for us by colonial masters. In the era of independence, we have experienced the shortcomings of these original instruments. Many of our sister countries have already embarked on this mission, and the Government and people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are beginning the process of forging a new constitution for the governance of the country in the twenty-first century.

As we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Year for Human Rights, we call on Member States to remember the rights of the 21 million people in Taiwan. The Republic of China on Taiwan, both prosperous and democratic, deserves to be readmitted as a member of the United Nations, even as it pursues the goal of reunification. It is necessary that the United Nations provide the forum for discussion that will provide the framework for the peaceful reunification of both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

My delegation congratulates the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), for its recent success in obtaining additional rights and privileges, such as the right to participate in the debate of the General Assembly and the right of reply. We hope that this new status will serve to enhance, rather than adversely affect, the peace talks between the PLO and Israel. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines strongly supports the Middle East peace process and the negotiations which seek the full implementation of the Oslo accords.

With the changing world environment, the Organization has assumed new prominence, and there is renewed hope and high expectations for, as well as new ideas on, the functioning of the General Assembly and, in particular, the reform of the Security Council. Let us not lose momentum in our common quest to give new life to this Organization.

We repeat our call, made during the Assembly's fifty-second session, for an increase in both the permanent and non-permanent membership of the

Security Council. Japan and Germany deserve their seats as permanent members, but Latin American and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia must be given permanent seats, which should be rotated among aspiring countries in those regions.

There has been much debate on whether new permanent members should have the same rights as the old permanent members. There must be no discrimination, and no two classes of permanent members. As regards the veto currently held by permanent members, in the opinion of my delegation, it is time for its abolition. We must be guided by the key word, "democracy", as we move to reform the United Nations.

As a member of the Alliance of Small Island States, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines fully supports initiatives to protect the environment. The effects of global warming are of grave concern to small islands like ours, whose coastal areas may become submerged, and whose protective coral reefs are at risk of total destruction. Meteorologists tell us that July 1998 was the hottest month since reliable records have been kept. We in the Caribbean can hardly doubt this, given the exceptional heat wave and humidity which we have experienced this year. Our region also continues to be battered by more frequent and stronger hurricanes, as evidenced this year again.

Hurricane Georges has devastated several islands in the Caribbean, leaving over 300 dead and hundreds of millions of dollars in damage to infrastructure, homes and utilities in its wake. The Gulf coast of the United States mainland has also suffered from the effects of that hurricane, providing us with a stark reminder that the forces of nature respect no borders. I take this opportunity to extend condolences and solidarity to all those who have lost relatives and loved ones, and to the Governments of the affected countries. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, with its limited resources, has already embarked on a programme of assistance to our sister countries in the Caribbean, where we know that each one of us is our brother's keeper.

The ecologically vulnerable islands and low-lying coastal States of the Caribbean are subject to all the acute consequences of urbanization and resource exploitation. We are exposed to the danger of waste being dumped in our seas and a rise in sea level as well as other effects of climate change. There must be a strong commitment to the reduction in greenhouse emissions. We must carry the momentum to combat climate change well into the twenty-first century in order to reduce the danger posed to our States.

The issue of the sustainable development of small island developing States involves much more than beaches and coral reefs. It is about the existence of effective partnerships between peoples and Governments, and between developed and developing countries.

It is against this backdrop that we look forward to the special session to review the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, which is scheduled for 1999. We expect the review to result in concrete and practical outcomes, and to foster the requisite political commitment to the process.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is a small but beautiful plural country, striving to maintain its agricultural, tourism and other service industries in this era of globalization. We, like so many developing countries today, suffer from the problems related to unemployment. We will continue to identify new and non-traditional areas, such as informatics and financial services, in order to create opportunities for our people, particularly our youth.

We must express concern about Draconian immigration laws and regulations being adopted by an increasing number of countries. As a region where emigration has been of historic importance, the Caribbean could be severely affected by these restrictions. These stringent immigration policies have led to massive and summary deportations of immigrants from our region and other developing countries. Some people face dehumanizing abuse and death as they try to escape from poverty by seeking refuge in more developed countries. I need not emphasize how serious a threat these actions pose to the social and economic well-being of the peoples of the Caribbean region.

The United Nations stands at the threshold of a new millennium. We pray that it continues to perform its rightful role in addressing the many issues that occupy us in our everyday lives. We believe that the reforms that we all desire will build on progress already made in areas of international cooperation.

Let us work together and give meaning to our Charter, to save succeeding generations from the scourges of war, poverty and hunger. Let us reaffirm our faith in fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth

of the human person and particularly the equal rights of man and woman, and of nations large and small.

Address by the Honourable Denzil Douglas, Prime Minister and Minister for National Security, Foreign Affairs, Finance, Planning and Information of Saint Kitts and Nevis

The Acting President: The Assembly will next hear an address by the Prime Minister and Minister for National Security, Foreign Affairs, Finance, Planning and Information of Saint Kitts and Nevis.

The Honourable Denzil Douglas, Prime Minister and Minister for National Security, Foreign Affairs, Finance, Planning and Information of Saint Kitts and Nevis, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister and Minister for National Security, Foreign Affairs, Finance, Planning and Information of Saint Kitts and Nevis, His Excellency The Honourable Denzil Douglas, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Douglas (Saint Kitts and Nevis): It is indeed my privilege, on behalf of the Government and people of Saint Kitts and Nevis, to have this opportunity once again to address the General Assembly.

I feel especially pleased to participate this year, which coincides with the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an instrument that has sought for the last 50 years to protect and advance the political, social and cultural human rights of peoples around the world.

Throughout this half-century, the debate on human rights has focused critical attention on cultural, social and political rights. Regrettably, we have failed to develop an international agenda which includes economic rights as an integral part of fundamental human rights.

Conceptually, political human rights, now a critical component of some foreign policy positions, have been fused imperceptibly with democracy, hence politics and human rights have become synonymous. I too am an advocate of human rights protection, and I believe strongly that if we insist on politics in human rights, the politics should be to enhance human dignity and the human condition by including all rights. The corpus of human rights demands innovative approaches whereby an individual's human rights are not measured only by the freedom to vote but also by the right to self-development in a holistic sense.

On the eve of the new millennium, I am still quite dissatisfied with the level of attention the world community is paying to the severe economic, environmental and potential political problems that threaten small island developing States. These problems are not new to this forum; they are well established and documented facts.

Only last year, I spoke about the vulnerability of small island States and the need to establish practical, viable programmes to help us in our own development process. I lamented also last year the serious and ill-conceived notion of graduating small States like Saint Kitts and Nevis into artificial categories based on gross national product per capita.

Today, I stand before the Assembly having witnessed firsthand the effects of hurricane Georges, which brought all sectors of the economy of Saint Kitts and Nevis to a standstill and increased the possibility of suffering. In a matter of a few hours, the growth and progress of the last few years have been literally wiped from the landscape of our lives. Large sectors of our rural communities in particular now appear to be reverting to a state of abject poverty.

This is the stark reality — the reality of small island developing States. We have no tolerance for bureaucrats or financial houses telling us which levels of development are acceptable. Our reality after a hurricane is about people living without the basic necessities that we all take for granted. It is about families displaced, having to watch their dreams in ruins. It is about women and children made homeless. This is about real life, not just figures arbitrarily concocted for dubious purposes.

It seems that we have become a community that relies heavily on figures. Therefore, let me share some of these figures here. Initial estimates of the damage and loss in productivity caused by only one hurricane have been placed at over $400 million, far exceeding the gross domestic product of Saint Kitts and Nevis. An estimated 85 per cent of the residential housing stock suffered slight to major damage; of that 85 per cent, approximately 25 per cent was destroyed. The agricultural sector, one of the major pillars on which the Saint Kitts and Nevis economy stands, has been devastated.

Agricultural output — sugar and non-sugar alike — is expected to be reduced by as much as 50 per cent next year. The health sector and our ability to provide high-quality care have been seriously compromised. Not only did the smaller rural hospitals suffer damage to property and equipment, but also the Federation's main hospital, the Joseph N. France General, lost a significant portion of its roof, and damage to equipment and stocks is considerable.

The scene of devastation is equally mind-boggling and severe in other neighbouring islands, such as Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Antigua and Barbuda, Cuba and St. Maarten. The suffering in my country is therefore not unique. However, the fact that we suffer the same fate year after year and rebuild only to watch our progress washed and blown away so easily speaks to the need to look seriously at the vulnerability of small island States.

I make an urgent appeal for the international community to come to the aid of our countries and our peoples. A draft resolution will shortly be introduced to the Assembly on countries of the north-eastern Caribbean affected by this year's storm, and I urge countries to support this effort by co-sponsoring the draft. Also, I wish to express the gratitude of my Government to those agencies, persons and Governments which have responded so readily in lending assistance.

I would hasten to add that the task of rebuilding will not finish as soon as the eyes of the camera shift their focus, nor will normalcy in its true sense return in a matter of weeks. We need material, technical and financial support on an ongoing basis as we rebuild our country.

I feel compelled to reiterate the problems of small States, especially in the light of continuous attempts to undermine our economies. My Government does not take lightly the complaints brought before the World Trade Organization, which are tantamount to the devastating hurricane winds on the small, vulnerable banana-producing economies in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States.

I also fear that, as such initiatives continue, the sugar industry in my own country will suffer a similar fate. Our negligible exports, in percentage terms, cannot pose any credible threat to any transnational corporation or large producer of bananas and sugar. However, the removal of this fragile access, which we must fight to maintain, could wreak untold havoc in social and economic terms on the lives of so many poor families in the eastern Caribbean region.

The insidious tentacles of injustice have such tremendous reach that international institutions such as the United Nations will be expected to devise ways to arrest its corrosive character by lending considerable support to the efforts of small island developing countries.

I say all this against the backdrop that most decisively, the twentieth century has etched in our consciousness evidence of the power of the human mind in its infinite creativity and potential. Now we are able to cure illnesses once thought incurable, and we create technological feats that boggle the mind. I therefore salute the men and women who have made this century great.

It becomes critically important, therefore, that as nations we utilize these landmark developments and shared experiences as the blueprints for the enormous challenges of poverty eradication, illicit drug trafficking, nuclear proliferation, warmongering, economic inequity, and disaster prevention and mitigation.

Inasmuch as this century has brought exceptional technological advances, economic initiative and growth, the new millennium will demand greater moral strength and public leadership. It will require its leaders to develop similar courage and statesmanship against powerful challenges. It will dare us all to harness the moral energy to transcend partisan agendas in favour of a common global imperative.

It is impractical to alienate an individual's human rights from the right to development. These are inseparable and paramount. My Government regards the growth of human rights in its entirety as a genuine step towards strengthening democracy itself. In order for democracy to take root and the democratic process to develop in its sincerest sense, we must nurture the complete range of fundamental human rights. Then and only then will the human person flourish.

When we hold ourselves up as standard bearers of democracy and bastions of human rights protection, it becomes essential to preserve human dignity worldwide. It has been said,

> "when the empire of man over nature can no longer be easily extended, then the only way for a people to increase its standard of living is by redistributing the sources or fruits of industry from others to themselves".

Any real hope for a more peaceful and equitable twenty-first century lies in the evolution of our thinking on human rights and other issues critical to small island States. One of the most crucial challenges in the coming century will be to address the quicksand of uneven economic development within the current economic system. These have direct consequences for the disparities in wealth and resource distribution. I raise the issue of vulnerability not to crave preferential treatment for our region, but because the international community must be mindful of our peculiar circumstances.

It is being said that the structure and growth of the world investment climate are being shaped by current events such as the Asian crisis, the European monetary union, along with the creation of the euro, advances in technology, liberalization of national financial markets and their integration into a global market. Where does this situation leave small island developing States like Saint Kitts and Nevis, especially when so many critical factors militate against our development priorities?

Foreign direct investment is considered one of the main vehicles of the liberalization process. Small developing economies are being forced to liberalize and integrate into the centre of a global economic system which has always relegated us to the periphery. International capital is steadfastly in search of new markets, yet has continued to overlook our region. Consequently, the vast majority of the $4 trillion in foreign direct investment spent in 1997 bypassed our countries in the Caribbean region. At the centre of international integrated investment flows,

> "are large international and transnational corporations and their affiliates whose global sales volume was estimated to have reached some $7 trillion in 1995".

This poses the question of how our agri-based and export-oriented economies cope with or even attempt to compete against giant transnational institutions in an era in which international production has now become more important than exports in terms of the delivery of goods and services to foreign markets.

Foreign direct investment, as I have come to understand it, integrates markets through intra-business activities and the production systems of countries. Therefore, our economies cannot participate in this huge and rapidly growing production system because we have not been given necessary technical, technological and material support to move into the centre of the global market place through its main vehicle — that is, production.

To make matters worse, we have not been allowed opportunities to gain appropriate access to those critical markets, whereas foreign businesses based in those countries have the access and capability to dominate and flood our markets with their cheap products.

One only needs to pay casual attention to the media to appreciate the tendency towards national and transnational mega-mergers and strategic economic business alliances that are taking place around the world. Our region is fast developing a competitive disadvantage.

Earlier I spoke of injustice. I consider it an injustice when capital can be mobilized and deployed in such ways that could easily destroy the welfare of entire nations with impunity or stifle competition completely. Globalization has been touted as a great vehicle of opportunity and promise; but I ask, for whom? Globalization, it is said, offers a huge reservoir of resources for investment growth, economic equity and social advancement. However, in my region we are yet to see these promises. In the Caribbean, we are much more familiar with the risks of globalization.

In anticipation of the changes taking place, our countries have made significant reforms. Regrettably, however, the international community, including prominent international financial institutions, has not always rallied in support of our efforts. Each year we build and we rebuild, but we are susceptible to external forces such as hurricanes. Our efforts, however, seem to go unnoticed.

Today, the wide rift between expectation and achievements continues to grow. Saint Kitts and Nevis looks forward to the convening of a special session to review the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, and the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action.

We urge the United Nations and the international financial institutions to take a fresh look at ways to help small developing countries integrate into this emerging system. However, the rules of this system will have to be informed by the special situation of vulnerable small island States.

We welcome initiatives on resource mobilization, on external debt relief, on trade and financing for

development and on good governance of the international monetary and financial systems. Good governance should refer not only to developing countries; it ought to be extended to include better management of the international economic system. Failure to do so would lead only to instability, uncivil societies and an ungovernable global market place.

The socio-economic and political dilemma facing small island developing States must be addressed now; otherwise, the human and political cost would be too high for us to bear.

Many small nations pay our assessed contributions regularly to the United Nations system despite our meagre resources and the challenges to our national survival. We therefore expect more. We expect tangible benefits from our membership. It is incumbent on the United Nations to work with small island States to ensure that they reap the rewards of the changing political market economy.

In my address last June to the United Nations special session on drugs, I assured this community of my Government's commitment to fighting the illicit drug trade. The Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis remains resolute in its commitment to cooperate in the eradication of the narcotics trade and associated vices.

This noble fight against a most nefarious and well-financed enemy carries a high financial cost. It is important to recognize that the role of consumption is just as important as that of supply. Therefore, we have a shared responsibility and must focus on joint approaches informed by cooperation and by mutual respect and understanding. Saint Kitts and Nevis remains undaunted and relentless in its approach to the interdiction of illicit drugs, as we work together with all nations in the name of justice, equity and advancing the human condition.

In the spirit of advancing the human condition, my Government urges restraint, patience and dialogue on the critical issues that separate the Chinese people in both geographic and political terms. It is our sincerest hope that the common aspirations and expectations of the Chinese people will be fulfilled in the near future in an environment of peace and mutual respect. We believe that the family bonds and historical tradition that have made the Chinese people a great nation ought to be preserved. We believe that the time has come for the voice of the millions of Chinese people in the Republic of China on Taiwan to be heard and factored into the international agenda. We believe that adequate, urgent and practical mechanisms must be developed to allow them to participate in the work of all nations.

In a world bedeviled by so many challenges, and in need of collective action and new resources, we alienate people and Governments at our own peril. We have an obligation to work with and encourage the Chinese people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait to support the progress made to date, so that the advancement of the human condition transcends politics. I urge negotiation and the development of confidence-building measures as a way to move towards improving cross-Strait relations.

We also call on the Government of Iraq to abide by all United Nations resolutions and to release all Kuwaiti prisoners of war and detainees, as well as those from other countries.

In conclusion, as we continue this debate I trust that we will be able to move beyond the constraints of the developed/developing country paradigm of us against them. To advance the human condition for all humankind will require meaningful partnership. Instead of apportioning blame, I urge Member States to join with me as we rededicate our energies to the search for lasting solutions. By working together, it becomes easier to find ways of attaining our national aspirations without trampling on the legitimate dreams of others.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister and Minister for National Security, Foreign Affairs, Finance, Planning and Information of Saint Kitts and Nevis.

The Honourable Denzil Douglas, Prime Minister and Minister for National Security, Foreign Affairs, Finance, Planning and Information of Saint Kitts and Nevis, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by The Honourable Donald Kalpokas, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Vanuatu

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Vanuatu.

The Honourable Donald Kalpokas, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Vanuatu, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Vanuatu, The Honourable Donald Kalpokas, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Kalpokas (Vanuatu): On behalf of the people and the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, I wish to join previous speakers in congratulating Mr. Didier Opertti on his election to this high and important post. His unanimous election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session shows the esteem in which the international community holds both him personally and his country, Uruguay. The Republic of Vanuatu and its delegation are confident he will guide this fifty-third session of the General Assembly to a successful conclusion.

May I also take this opportunity to express my delegation's sincere appreciation to his predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, for his outstanding stewardship in facilitating the work of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. I also wish to commend our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his wise leadership and his dedication to the reform and restructuring of our Organization. We ask the President to assure him of our total support.

Three years ago, we all gathered here to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of our Organization and, in particular, to renew our commitment to the fundamental principles that created it in 1945.

We also made a strong commitment to further strengthen our genuine, collaborative efforts to ensure that this Organization continues to promote global peace, justice and a healthy environment, as well as to support the process of sustainable development of its Member nations, in particular the small island least developed countries such as those in the Pacific region, including the Republic of Vanuatu.

The current international political and economic situation has grown ever more complex and makes increasing demands on our own resources and on the support available from our development partners.

We are deeply concerned by the continuing escalation of such international crimes as drug-trafficking, money-laundering, terrorism, organized crime and other similar activities which have the potential to place the sovereignty and territorial integrity of small island States at great risk. The international community must show its genuine collaboration in combating these criminal phenomena if the new philosophy of globalization is to progress in a positive manner.

We do not believe that the world is doing justice to its people and to the fundamental principles of peace and economic prosperity as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations if we do not observe our joint call for the disarmament of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. International security cannot be guaranteed if we fail to accord priority attention and resources to the education and health of humankind and its survival into the next millennium.

The momentum of the fiftieth anniversary of our Organization, the lessons we have learned from past mistakes and our renewed commitment must guide us in our pursuit of a better world where, through this Organization, a renewed sense of mutual trust and genuine dialogue can be achieved to ease political tensions and economic crises in all regions and subregions of the planet.

In our part of the world, these new developments constitute a real threat to the already vulnerable environment of our island economies and populations. Confronted with these challenges, many countries in the Pacific region, including the Republic of Vanuatu, do not have much choice, at the end of this century, but to embark on difficult programmes of reform both within their respective Governments and within their societies.

Last year, my predecessor, The Honourable Serge Vohor, advised this Assembly that Vanuatu had initiated a comprehensive reform programme, with the support of both multilateral and bilateral donor agencies and countries. He also made an appeal to this Assembly, explaining that in order for the reform programme to be successful and responsive to the needs of the national population, 80 per cent of whom live from subsistence farming in rural areas, Vanuatu would continue to need the special support accorded to it as a least developed country.

The role of Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko and the Secretary-General in subsequently facilitating a constructive dialogue and a comprehensive appreciation of the economic hardships of Vanuatu must be commended.

In this regard, the Government and the people of Vanuatu warmly welcome the recent decision of the

Economic and Social Council of the United Nations to defer consideration of Vanuatu's graduation from least developed country status, pending full assessment of the usefulness of the vulnerability index and ecological fragility as criteria for least developed country designation. We would like to register our most sincere appreciation and recognition to each and every country and group of countries for their support.

One of the commitments we all made during the fiftieth anniversary celebrations in 1995 was to reform our Organization so that it could be effective in addressing the problems and needs of its Member States, both individually and as a group.

From our perspective — and we have no doubt that others share it — the United Nations must include in its reform agenda a full assessment and recognition of the inherent particularities of small island States such as the Republic of Vanuatu, and the impact of the international economic crisis on their economic performance and the sustainability of their political stability.

The impact of the Asian economic situation and such recurrent national disasters as tropical cyclones, tidal waves and global warming on our island economies has yet to be fully appraised. This warrants the urgent and dedicated attention of our Organization.

With particular regard to the environment, the first chapter of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States clearly states that small island States are particularly vulnerable to global climate change and rising sea levels.

We would therefore like to suggest, in the spirit of reform, that the current scope of development-related indicators being used by the United Nations to designate the status of each Member State be thoroughly reviewed in close consultation with the Member States and other regional and multilateral organizations, such as the South Pacific Forum and the Commonwealth.

This is an important exercise at a time when we must adjust our national administrative structures, policy directives and legal framework to gradually accommodate the requirements of globalization. It would be unfair and unrealistic to expect small island least developed countries to satisfy all the administrative, financial and legal requirements of the World Trade Organization, for instance, within the same time-frame as the developed countries. An effective sequencing of the accession process is needed, taking into account the capacity of each country's political and economic system or structure to adjust without affecting social cohesion.

The Republic of Vanuatu is committed to the principle of global trade liberalization. The current reform programme reflects this. We are asking the international community to recognize that we should be allowed to be integrated on a gradual basis, taking into account our capacity to administer the process and to adjust to the new environment.

It is in this same spirit that the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu welcomes the decision of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly to convene the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in the year 2001.

It is still in this spirit that the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu endorses the Declaration of the eighth annual meeting of ministers from least developed countries, adopted on 28 September 1998.

The Republic of Vanuatu is proud to be associated this year with the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the fifth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

I am pleased to advise this Assembly that the current reform programme of the Republic of Vanuatu has taken full account of the above principles and the Government's commitment in this regard.

An example of this commitment is our wider recognition of the rights and the role of women in our society through the establishment, within the Prime Minister's portfolio, of a more systematic mechanism of constructive dialogue between the Government on the one hand, and the National Council of Women and other non-governmental organizations on the other hand. The recent enactment of a first ever leadership code for Vanuatu is another example in this regard. This will not only ensure good governance, transparency and the rule of law, but will also act as an effective deterrent to corruption and abuse of power by national leaders in political circles, in public service and in the religious community, as well as in traditional society.

The pursuit and promotion of a free and responsible press and the protection of individual rights are matters which are receiving more attention under the reform programme. These are real challenges to Vanuatu today,

but they are challenges which we are confident that we can successfully address over time with the necessary support of the international community.

The right to self-determination must also continue to occupy our agenda. The United Nations, as mandated by its Charter, must be seen to encourage and support dialogue at appropriate political levels in the regions and countries where human sufferings and social disorder continue as a direct result of conflict of opinions on the issue of self-determination. In the Pacific region, we warmly welcomed the signing earlier this year of the Noumea Accord between the French Government and the major political parties in New Caledonia. We believe that this new agreement marks a stronger commitment by all parties to work together to support an irreversible trend for the future political status of New Caledonia.

As I said earlier, the world and our Organization will be going through very challenging times as we are set to turn the page of this century and start a new one. The credibility of the United Nations in the next millennium will be measured in terms of its effectiveness in responding to the real situations prevailing in its Member States, especially in small island States. It is therefore vital that we all support and supplement the process of reform spearheaded by the Secretary-General and aimed at streamlining and strengthening the Organization.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Vanuatu for the statement he has just made.

The Honourable Douglas Kalpokas, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Vanuatu, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I call next on His Excellency The Honourable Keli Walubita, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Zambia.

Mr. Walubita (Zambia): Let me start by congratulating Mr. Didier Opertti on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. In the same breath, I thank his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko of Ukraine, for the able manner in which he conducted the work of the fifty-second session. I also wish to express my delegation's sincere appreciation to our brother, the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, for his wise leadership of the United Nations and for his exceptional report on the work of the Organization.

We are gathered here once again to review the international situation. The fifty-second session of the Assembly had before it the document submitted by the Secretary-General entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform". The debate on that item was as serious as it was animated. It became clear that the United Nations in its present form is unable to respond to the realities of the present world order, much less to the exigencies of the new millennium. For the United Nations to do so, it must reinvent itself, and become more democratic, efficient and, of course, financially stable. This would befit an Organization created to serve the demanding needs of humankind through its impact on economic and social development, especially in the developing countries. Zambia would like to reiterate that the development mandate of the United Nations must be given priority and prominence in the reform process.

Furthermore, after the issue of reform was debated last year, it was made clear that the critical financial situation of the United Nations was itself a major stumbling block to the Organization's efforts not only to reform itself, but to address the priorities it has set itself to accomplish. We therefore reiterate our call for arrears owed to the United Nations to be paid in full, on time and without preconditions.

The reform of the Security Council is without doubt the core issue which must be addressed, with a view to making the Council more democratic. Essentially, the Council must be enlarged to enhance its credibility and at the same time to reflect the universal character of the United Nations; this would remove the imbalances that characterize the present composition of the Council. To this end, the Zambian delegation wishes to reiterate the call made at the twelfth Summit of the Countries of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Durban, in neighbouring South Africa, that expansion of the Security Council should be by no less than 11 new seats, based on the principle of equitable geographical distribution and, of course, bearing in mind the sovereign equality of Member States.

Zambia further reiterates its support for the demand that the regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean should now have permanent seats on an expanded Security Council.

With specific regard to Africa, my delegation wishes to reaffirm the decision taken at the summit of heads of State of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Harare in 1997 that five seats, of which two permanent, should be allocated to the African continent and that, in a 26-member Security Council, the African seats should be rotated in accordance with the agreed criteria of the African Group. My delegation further wishes to reiterate the common view that the veto power in the Security Council is a mere anachronism. It must be restricted and ultimately eliminated.

In the field of international peace and security, the need for disarmament in all its aspects is as urgent as ever. To be sure, the lure of nuclear-weapons possession has become even stronger and the use of conventional weapons, particularly small arms, is prevalent in the world today.

To put an end to nuclear-weapons proliferation, the nuclear-weapon States have a major responsibility to lead the international community towards nuclear disarmament, particularly in the Conference on Disarmament. The Conference must establish an ad hoc committee to begin negotiations on a phased programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons within a specified time-frame. The nuclear-weapon States should also lead the international community in sustained efforts to conclude a nuclear weapons convention.

Furthermore, Zambia believes that the time is now overdue for the convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, which would offer an opportunity for a thorough review and assessment of the implementation of the provisions of the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, held in 1978.

Allow me at this juncture to turn to the situation in our region, with specific reference to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola and, of course, Lesotho.

With regard to the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I want to confirm that Zambia, through its President, Mr. Frederick Chiluba, has been actively involved in the search by all regional leaders for a lasting and peaceful solution. The leaders of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), under the able leadership of President Mandela of South Africa and other regional leaders, have done a commendable job in this regard — of course, under very difficult circumstances.

As we are all well aware, the maintenance of international peace and security is the primary responsibility of no other body than this Organization and its Security Council. There is no doubt, therefore, that the situation in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo, if unresolved, could pose a threat not only to the region, but also to international peace and security. The mediation efforts of SADC and other regional leaders therefore deserve the support of the international community in order to forestall the threat to international peace and security which the crisis poses.

The situation in Angola has continued to worsen, despite the patience and efforts of the international community to bring Africa's oldest civil war to an end. Zambia, as a neighbouring country and as host to the peace talks which finally resulted in the signing of the Lusaka Protocol in November 1994, is extremely concerned about the regression in the Angolan peace process. While the anger and disappointment of the international community are understandable and justified, it would not be advisable for us, at this moment, to abandon the peace process in Angola. We have come this far after long and painstaking efforts and invested a great amount of resources in the Angolan peace process. We cannot afford now to abandon the Angolan people, who have suffered so much and whose hopes were pinned on the Lusaka Protocol. We hope, therefore, that in spite of the setbacks, the international community, through this body, will reassert its authority and use its immense wisdom to put the Angolan peace process back on track.

Zambia wishes to recognize the very noble and professional efforts of our brother, the late Alioune Blondin Beye, in this process. He died without seeing his efforts result in peace and stability in Angola. May his soul rest in peace. It is important, however, to ensure that his efforts were not in vain by working harder ultimately to bring durable peace to Angola.

My country is also concerned about recent developments in Lesotho. As a member of SADC, Zambia is fully in support of the role which that organization is playing in trying to bring about a peaceful settlement. In this regard, we wish to appeal to the international community to give necessary support to the SADC efforts, spearheaded by Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

It is now common knowledge that Africa as a whole has begun to make significant economic and political progress in recent years. However, in many parts of the

continent, progress remains threatened or, indeed, impeded by conflict. United Nations records show that, since 1970, more than 30 wars have been fought in Africa alone, the vast majority of them intra-State in origin.

In this regard, my delegation wishes once again to congratulate our brother, Secretary-General Kofi Annan, for his excellent report to the Security Council last April on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, which is essentially a blueprint for resolving Africa's numerous and complex woes by charting a course for peace and development.

In the area of peacekeeping, Africa has already put in place the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution to resolve its own conflicts on the continent. We salute the efforts of Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary-General of the OAU, in this direction. We urge the international community and the General Assembly to support the Mechanism in order for it to function effectively and to the benefit of Africa.

The spectre of international terrorism has assumed a dangerous momentum of its own. It does not discriminate between combatants and non-combatants. The brunt of it all is in fact borne more by innocent bystanders. The acts of terrorism that rocked our sister republics of Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa, and the subsequent retaliatory action on Sudan and Afghanistan, have struck a cord in all of us, without exception. At issue is the unnecessary loss of human life. To protect human life, the international community should seriously address itself to the root causes of terrorism. The hour has now come for the full implementation of the General Assembly Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism contained in resolution 49/60, and the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings adopted at the fifty-second session. This Assembly must waste no time in its urgent conclusion and effective implementation of a comprehensive international convention on combating terrorism.

We are happy to note that the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court, which was held in Rome, Italy, this year, adopted the Court's Statute. This is a powerful instrument of justice that the international community has given to itself and generations to come. My delegation is pleased that the crime of aggression falls within the jurisdiction of the Court, although the Court shall only have jurisdiction over the crime once a definition and the conditions under which the Court shall do its work are agreed upon. In this regard, we look forward to a quick resolution of this matter, since resolution 3314 (XXIX) contains most of the elements for definition of the crime of aggression.

Considering what the world has witnessed in our sister republic of Rwanda and in the former Yugoslavia, we welcome the inclusion, under war crimes, of cases of armed conflict not of an international character.

Let me now, on behalf of my delegation, turn to the world economy, which is becoming more integrated. Globalization and liberalization are indeed the current economic wave, and will continue in years to come. They have, however, far-reaching implications, in particular for the developing countries, as reflected in the current international financial confusion or turmoil. The United Nations faces the great challenge of coming up with initiatives to manage globalization and liberalization in such a manner that they benefit the entire community of nations, without exception. Processes of globalization and liberalization that undermine development are not in the interests of the international community.

The external debt problem is yet another issue that impacts negatively on the economic and social development of many developing countries, Zambia included. We can recall a number of initiatives put in place to resolve this particular problem, but so far none seem to be effective, including the present Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative, which not only has targeted too few developing countries but also has a long transition period before eligibility is granted.

It would, however, be a grave oversight to fail to acknowledge the commendable efforts of our brother, the Secretary-General, in this area. Zambia welcomes the uniform and strong endorsement by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development of the Secretary-General's proposals to liberalize and assess the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative and convert all remaining official debt owed by the poorest African countries, Zambia included, into grants. We also welcome his other proposals which received similar endorsement by the Development Assistance Committee.

Adverse weather patterns continue to bring into sharp focus how fragile the global environment is. The recent destruction of life and property by Hurricane

Georges in some countries of the Caribbean and four States in the United States of America adds to the ravages of flooding in China and Bangladesh this year. This Assembly will recall that a year earlier Europe faced similar flooding, while certain parts of Eastern and Southern Africa faced a combination of flooding and drought. All these are reminders to the international community to meet the challenges caused by climate change and other adverse environmental factors and we reiterate our call to the international community to promote environmental sustainability with renewed commitment.

Transnational deflationary forces are threatening global economic stability. In this uncertain outlook, the fortunes of many countries are under constant threat. For Africa, which is just emerging from the lost decade of the 1980s, the emerging global economic turmoil will add new strains to the process of promoting economic growth and development. Indeed, it is already clear that concern about the emerging global economic turmoil neglects the challenges facing Africa, as if to reaffirm its marginalization in the world economy.

In a spirit of interdependence, we in Africa call upon the international community not to overlook and forget the challenges of Africa. Africa needs a conducive international environment that will contribute to resolving the continent's external debt crisis, growing poverty, slow export growth and other impediments to its development.

In this regard, we are pleased to note that Japan will soon be convening the Second Tokyo International Conference on African Development. We salute Japan. And we hope this forum will offer an opportunity to relaunch the dialogue on African development.

Zambia, like many other developing countries, has been implementing a very painful structural adjustment programme anchored on macroeconomic stabilization, privatization and, of course, commercialization. The policies we have undertaken have been critical to boosting and sustaining economic growth and development. Over the past few years Zambia has undergone a remarkable transformation. We have an open economy driven by the private sector. In the second generation of economic reforms that we are embarking upon our major focus is on the reduction of poverty by 50 per cent by the year 2004. We invite the international community to come and play a role in our economic programme.

Let me conclude by stating that Zambia believes that, as we stand on the threshold of the new millennium, we all have a collective responsibility in this community of nations to chart a new course to strengthen our Organization. We need a strong United Nations to meet the exacting demands of the future. By strengthening it, we all strengthen ourselves. Zambia pledges to be a positive partner in this noble endeavour.

I thank the Assembly for listening to me. I thank those representatives — most of those present — who nodded their heads in appreciation. I thank my brothers and sisters from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) for being with me.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I call next on His Excellency, The Honourable Ivan Antonovich, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belarus.

Mr. Antonovich (Belarus): Please accept our sincere congratulations, Sir, on the occasion of your election to preside over the fifty-third session, as well as our wishes for success in realizing the goals and principles of the United Nations.

We welcome all the efforts of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the benefit of the Organization and its Member States, and sincerely wish him further success on his way, which is strewn not with roses alone.

With appropriate respect and great appreciation for the activities of the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko of Ukraine, we wish him important achievements in his activities as a Member of Parliament in his native country.

Today, on the very threshold of the third millennium, it becomes clear for the majority of Member States that the time has come to take comprehensive measures for everyone to turn the determination of the peoples of the United Nations, declared in its Charter, into reality "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war ... to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours". In fact, that was the ultimate goal behind all the diverse activities of the United Nations in the years after its Charter came into force in 1945.

The world goes through non-stop change. Today the global environment in which Member States cooperate to achieve the goals of the Charter is different from that of half a century ago. United Nations activities should reflect more adequately those sweeping changes of the

second half of the twentieth century, many of which shattered the world.

The Government of the Republic of Belarus has been persistent and consistent in its efforts to promote peace, friendship, good-neighbourly relations and mutually beneficial cooperation. This policy is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, chapter 18 of which, in particular, declares:

> "In its foreign policy the Republic of Belarus proceeds from the principles of the equality of States, non-use of force or the threat to use force, inviolability of frontiers, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-interference in internal affairs of States and other universally acknowledged principles and standards of international law.
>
> "The Republic of Belarus pledges itself to make its territory a neutral, nuclear-weapon-free State."

Thus the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus is consistent with all our obligations under the United Nations Charter and other instruments of international law to which Belarus is a party.

The United Nations is to define far-reaching goals and guidelines for international cooperation into the twenty-first century. Everybody wants to be better off, to have the opportunity to work and live in peace and freedom. There is a need for the United Nations to elaborate an effective legislative, economic, social and political framework to give humankind an opportunity to realize these legitimate aspirations in an environment much more favourable than the one we have had in the century that draws to its close.

Most global problems are persistent, hard to resolve and resist old approaches. We should seek new solutions and reach agreements to do away with the problems in unconventional, innovative ways. I believe that the proposed reform of the United Nations will give us a good opportunity to achieve this. Our attitude to the reform was defined in the letter of the President of the Republic of Belarus, His Excellency Mr. Alyaksandr Lukashenka, to the Secretary-General. We must ensure that reforming the activities of the United Nations does not disrupt the attainment of its goals and the implementation of its principles or derogate the interests of Member States and regional groups. Reforms should not mean disorganization. Reforms should mean the synergy of the best United Nations achievements in all areas of its activities, which have been developed for more than half a century. We believe in the ability of the Secretary-General and his staff to lead our Organization exactly in the required direction.

On its part, the Republic of Belarus will do its utmost to contribute in all ways possible to the enhancement of the efficiency of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, and will seek generally acceptable agreements on all the issues of the global agenda. Strengthening the United Nations system and reforming the Security Council on the basis of just and balanced representation of the regional groups would be most instrumental in this respect. Together with other East European States, in particular members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Belarus has been an active initial proponent of the demand to allocate an additional non-permanent seat to that group in the expanded Security Council.

People all over the world and the international community as a whole can no longer tolerate the killing of human beings in inter-State and intra-State armed conflicts. During the years after the Second World War thousands upon thousands, if not millions of people, have been killed. Nevertheless, hostilities continue in different regions of the globe. Conflicts in Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans stay unresolved; still unsettled are situations in Cyprus and other regions. In these tremendously difficult circumstances the United Nations is continuing to fulfil its responsibility with dignity. Yet there is ample room for further improvement.

We consider that the principles of the peaceful settlement of disputes and non-interference in internal affairs should be strictly observed while bringing about reconciliation in regional and domestic conflicts. Any enforcement measures should only be applied following the adoption of a Security Council resolution. Accordingly, the use of force by individual States or regional organizations at their own discretion should not be permissible. One of the objectives stipulated in the United Nations Charter, in the preamble, is "to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest".

It is difficult for the Government and people of the Republic of Belarus to comprehend why in certain quarters the idea of a military attack on the sovereign State of Yugoslavia is being publicly discussed just because the latter decided to solve its domestic problems, though really complicated, in its own way and would not

rubber-stamp recipes enforced from outside. It is also time that Yugoslavia's full membership of the United Nations be resumed. The mere threat of the use of force could seriously disrupt peace and stability in Europe, revive old fears and animosities and generate more distrust.

The very serious problems that humanity faces today can be solved by reason and joint actions, rather than by force. Paradoxically, despite the ever growing industrial and economic output in the world, the number of people living below the poverty line is not diminishing. More and more people are becoming refugees or displaced persons. Humanism, justice, fairness and respect for human rights have not become universal. Terrorism, organized crime and illegal drug trafficking have not been overcome, and even tend to grow. We share the Secretary-General's view that the forces of globalization "pose extraordinary opportunities, as well as enormous challenges". (*A/53/1, para. 229*) The recent financial crisis in many parts of the world is one of the latest and clearest manifestations of that.

Ecological interdependence has not yet become a matter of common awareness, as evidenced, in particular, by the attitude to efforts to mitigate the after-effects of the Chernobyl disaster. Belarus, which absorbed 70 per cent of all the radioactive Chernobyl fallout, spends one fifth of its budget annually to eliminate the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. We are grateful for all international assistance, particularly in the rehabilitation of children. At the same time, the United Nations has prepared the inter-agency programme of international assistance to areas affected by the Chernobyl disaster, in order to revive international interaction for Chernobyl programmes and make it more purposeful and effective. Furthermore, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has organized two international special donor meetings to raise funds for the implementation of this programme, estimated at $74 million. Yet the results of those meetings appear modest so far and demonstrate a disappointing deficit of international solidarity with the affected countries in solving their problems.

Given the global dimensions and implications of the disaster, I would like to take this opportunity to again call on the donor countries, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to consider every possibility of their participation in financing the implementation of the programme.

It is common knowledge that Belarus took an unprecedented step in post-world-war history by voluntarily and unconditionally renouncing the nuclear arsenal in its possession. Ukraine and Kazakhstan undertook similar measures, but at a later stage. These initiatives received unanimous high international appreciation, as confirmed by relevant United Nations resolutions, and were also endorsed by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member States, which explicitly welcomed the step. The latter specifically voiced, through NATO's Secretary-General, its support of the goal shared by Belarus to "establish a common security system that would meet the interests of all States". At first, it seemed that there was a will to legally consolidate a newly emerging international security system and to promote disarmament, non-proliferation and the non-use of nuclear weapons. Those aspirations, however, have yet to be realized.

According to the United Nations Disarmament Commission, nuclear-weapon-free zones at present cover more than half of the Earth's surface, with an aggregate membership of 144 countries. Yet there is still resistance to the creation of new nuclear-weapon-free zones, in the southern hemisphere as well as the northern hemisphere. Therefore, the Belarus initiative of retaining a nuclear-weapon-free status quo in Central and Eastern Europe is also stalled. The emergence of new nuclear-capable countries also affected the situation with regard to the existing nuclear-weapon-free zones, whose members have yet to win the acknowledgement of their nuclear-weapon-free status by the nuclear States. Moreover, there are no guarantees that other "threshold" States will not express in the future their intention to join the "nuclear club". We urge those Member States which have not yet done so to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). We would also welcome progress in the respective activities of the Conference on Disarmament and the United Nations Disarmament Commission.

In view of the above, a more constructive approach to the issue of disarmament and arms limitation, *inter alia*, in the nuclear field, is called for. The reduction of nuclear stockpiles currently under way in the United States and Russia is to be complemented by similar efforts by other holders of nuclear weapons, so as to jointly facilitate the complete disbanding of nuclear and other means of mass destruction. It is the ultimate objective. To attain it, a number of specific prerequisites must be created.

I would like to refer in particular to the statement of the NATO ministerial meeting on 10 December 1996, confirmed by the NATO heads of State or Government in the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Russian Federation of 27 May 1997, which maintains that "the NATO States have no intention, plan or reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of the new members." We believe that that statement by NATO deserves approval by a General Assembly resolution.

I should also mention the 1996 Stockholm Declaration of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly, which contains a reference to the decision of the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference that "the establishment of additional nuclear-weapon-free zones by the time of the Review Conference in the year 2000 would be welcome." *(NPT/Conf.1995/32, Part I, Decision 2, para. 6)*

With due regard to that, we cannot accept the argument that it is premature to discuss and implement the initiative to create a nuclear-weapon-free space in Central and Eastern Europe at this juncture, and that it might only be addressed in the distant future. Inspired by new partnerships, we cannot possibly let the existing de facto nuclear-weapon-free status of Central and Eastern Europe evaporate. We are convinced that the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free space in Europe would constructively contribute to the shaping of a new European security architecture aspired to by all the OSCE Member States.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is widely celebrated this year throughout the world. The provisions of the Declaration and other international instruments on human rights, to which Belarus is a dutiful party, are reflected in the Constitution and other legislation of my country and are strictly implemented at the State level, proceeding from the indivisibility and interdependency of civil rights and obligations.

Much has been done in Belarus to highlight the United Nations efforts to promote and protect human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was reprinted and widely circulated. The National Assembly held parliamentary hearings devoted to human rights. It should be noted here that the hearings were broadcast live on Belorussian radio in their entirety. Other undertakings are envisaged, including preparations to introduce the institution of Ombudsman in Belarus. All these efforts are aimed, to cite the United Nations Charter, at promoting "social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom". The representatives of Belarus will give a detailed account of these matters during the discussion of relevant issues on the agenda.

At the same time, we share the position of other Member States that there is an ever pressing need to observe the United Nations Charter and declarations based thereon concerning non-interference in the internal affairs of States and the protection of their independence and sovereignty. The same is true of the principles of international law referring to friendly relations and cooperation between States.

I would like to pay special tribute to the positive experience Belarus has gained in cooperating with United Nations bodies. We greatly appreciate the role and importance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in our country regarding human resources development, strengthening the potential of State management, restructuring industries and creating civil society.

We hope for a broadening of the United Nations programme activities related to solving the problems faced by the Republic of Belarus and other countries with economies in transition.

Our people live in a non-violent environment and work very hard to overcome current economic difficulties and achieve substantial output in the State-owned and private sectors. In that context, in 1997 gross domestic product increased by 10 per cent and industrial output by 17 per cent, and the production of consumer goods also rose. This all came about as a result of the efforts made by the Belorussian people, as well as through the promotion of subregional integration and cooperation with other countries.

Belarus, like other CIS States, is painstakingly striving to overcome the tremendous difficulties that emerged in the country after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Now that we are in a period of transition, my country would be justified in expecting encouragement, solidarity and support from the international community. We would appreciate such support from all countries and from every people of the world.

The Republic of Belarus is committed to the conscientious fulfilment of all its international obligations under the United Nations Charter in their integrity, and we wish success to the family of nations in this work.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: We have heard the last speaker in the debate for this meeting.

A number of delegations have asked to speak in exercise of the right of reply. I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply shall be limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Larraín (Chile) *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I am obliged to take the floor to refer to aspects of the statement made this morning by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bolivia. While we are convinced that these matters are of no interest to the delegations present, as neither the United Nations nor any other international forum has any competency with regard to issues relating to the sovereignty of States, it is our duty to clarify some of his comments.

First, there is no contested border between Chile and Bolivia and there are no outstanding sovereignty questions between Chile and Bolivia. The 1904 Treaty concerning peace, friendship and trade between Chile and Bolivia, which was freely entered into and broadly supported by the Bolivian Congress, and which is fully in force, definitively settled all the territorial and sovereignty issues between our two countries almost a century ago. We therefore hope that Minister Murillo, who strangely failed to mention that legal instrument, did not give the false and misleading impression that there may still be an unsettled and outstanding conflict between Chile and Bolivia.

Secondly, I should like to reaffirm that the Government of Bolivia can be sure that Chile will continue to guarantee Bolivia access to the Chilean coast in accordance with valid international treaties, providing facilities that are greater than those granted to any other landlocked country in the world. However, it must be made absolutely clear that Chile is not prepared to discuss matters relating to its national sovereignty.

Thirdly, if there are no diplomatic relations between Chile and Bolivia today it is because they were unilaterally broken off more than two decades ago by Bolivia. However, Chile would have no difficulty in resuming such diplomatic relations, on an unconditional basis and when Bolivia is ready.

Fourthly, Chile has always been ready to cooperate with Bolivia on the path of integration and development. Since 1990, with the advent of democracy in Chile, both countries have been able to progress in a constructive dialogue that has led to many initiatives about which I need not go into great detail.

The Foreign Minister of Bolivia referred to a resolution of the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted two decades ago at a conference held in the capital of his country, as well as to a Non-Aligned Movement statement. However, he failed to say that for exactly two decades there has been no support for Bolivia's approach at the hemisphere level, and that when members of the Non-Aligned Movement expressed their views on the issue Chile was suspended from the Movement because of its internal institutional difficulties. Neither did he mention the many occasions when, in the bodies to which I have referred and in others, there was absolutely no attempt to consider the unjustified Bolivian allegation, let alone support it.

We agree with the Foreign Minister of Bolivia that the course that both nations should take is the one that leads to integration. That is the spirit that has inspired Chile. But for that process to move forward the other party must show willing. It goes against the integration process to try to rekindle conflicts from 120 years ago or artfully to encourage the re-examination of border treaties that are fully in line with international law. Such treaties are the very ones that shape the borders of America and form the basis of the regional stability that has stimulated the integration process.

The Government of Chile reaffirms its readiness to continue a constructive bilateral dialogue, without the need for guidance or supervision. We should like to make it clear that if there has been no dialogue over the past year it is not for lack of willingness on our part, but is the result of an aggressive foreign policy directed by Bolivia against Chile.

Ms. Raguz (Croatia): I am grateful for this opportunity to exercise the right of reply. What I wish to say concerns Mr. Antonovich's comment with regard to the resumption by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia of full membership of the United Nations. The Security Council and the General Assembly have clearly declared their opinion on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as an equal legitimate successor State after the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Therefore, before the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia assumes full membership of the Organization, it should follow the same procedure as any other new State seeking membership, as has been done by the other successor

States of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Mr. Murillo de la Rocha (Bolivia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): It is truly imperative for me to comment on the statement just made by the delegation of Chile, because we believe that all matters brought before and debated in the Assembly should be subject to great historical accuracy.

First, the representatives of Chile, at these kinds of meetings, invariably say that there are no outstanding problems with Bolivia, because they were all settled by the 1904 treaty. But that treaty did not resolve the landlocked nature of our country; on the contrary, it sealed it off unfairly. I must emphasize the fact that Bolivia agreed to sign that Treaty only after more than 20 years, which shows the great reluctance of the Governments and citizens of that era to agree to the loss of our coast. Chile imposed clauses that were eventually included in that instrument. The treaty was signed, and Chile began military occupation of the coast and took control of customs. Chile's Public Treasury received those profits. For that reason it is very difficult to state officially that these were international negotiations, free from any pressure, that took away Bolivia's sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean and to the facilities and advantages of a coastal country.

As I stated this morning, on many occasions agreements were reached in which Chile agreed to cede to Bolivia a sovereign piece of land providing access to the coast. We have ongoing problems as far as free transit is concerned, mainly in the export of mineral ores. We hope that at no time soon will we again, here or in another forum, have to appeal for international solidarity because of the grave obstacles impeding the free flow of minerals through the port of Antofagasta.

With respect to resolutions of the Organization of American States (OAS), the evidence does not bear out the contention that Bolivia would have received support only at the ninth meeting of the OAS in 1979. Let me remind the representative of Chile that since 1979 11 consecutive resolutions have stipulated that the settlement of Bolivia's problem was of interest to the entire hemisphere. Furthermore, in the last of those resolutions the issue was made a standing item on the agenda of the OAS.

Finally, I think a Chilean should answer a Chilean, so let me briefly read out what Mr. Vicente Huidobro has said about this topic:

> "Bolivia has asked for a port. What could be more logical? Any large country in the same situation would do the same. We Chileans, if we were in the Bolivians' shoes, would we not wish access to the sea? One cannot condemn a country to be perpetually landlocked. History teaches us that these kinds of mistakes must be paid for sooner or later. And why make enemies of people who could be our friends?
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> "I believe, as a Chilean and as a human being, that we must sit down and talk with Bolivia, and that both countries should and must settle in a spirit of generosity and friendship this serious problem of Bolivia's access to the sea. Let no one think that I mean that even a little piece of our national territory should be lost. What I mean is that this problem must be addressed as soon as possible and resolved in a way that is mutually beneficial to both countries. Bolivia's access to the sea is in the hands of Chile, and it would be sad were Chile to turn a deaf ear to the voice of its neighbour. Bolivia has a vital need for a port. It is asking without resorting to threats, secret alliances or shady manoeuvres. It is asking in a spirit of fair play."

Mr. Reznikov (Belarus) (*interpretation from Russian*): I was a bit surprised at the statement by the representative of Croatia, because the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus in his statement did not touch upon the question of the procedure of membership of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Mr. Larraín (Chile) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bolivia has once again tried to distort the facts. Out of respect for the patience of representatives and the lateness of the hour, I shall not reiterate my country's position, which is perfectly clear and well known by the international community, though Bolivia once again pretends to be unaware of it.

If the Government of Bolivia truly wishes to opt for the course of integration, they will find that Chile always stands ready for dialogue. Today once again Bolivia's strategy has failed.

The meeting rose at 7.05 p.m.

United Nations A/53/PV.23

General Assembly
Fifty-third Session

Official Records

23rd plenary meeting
Thursday, 1 October 1998, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Chad, His Excellency Mr. Mahamat Saleh Annadif.

Mr. Annadif (Chad) (*interpretation from French*): At the outset, I should like, on my own personal behalf and on behalf of the Republic of Chad, to express our great pleasure and congratulations on your brilliant election, Sir, to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. The confidence placed in you to guide our work reflects the international community's recognition of the contribution of your country, Uruguay, to the defence of the ideals of the United Nations. Your competence and experience reinforce our conviction that you will conduct our work with success. Please be assured of the support and cooperation of the delegation of the Republic of Chad in the accomplishment of your task.

I cannot continue without first expressing all my delegation's gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Y. Udovenko of Ukraine, who, during his term of office, worked with such dedication, competence and tact on the many pressing issues calling for mankind's attention.

I also pay a well-deserved tribute to our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his constant efforts to strengthen the role of our Organization on the international scene, especially in the quest for international peace and security. In this context, may he rest assured of the renewed support of the Republic of Chad for the reforms that are needed to make our Organization better able to achieve its goals in the context of the rapid changes sweeping the world.

The ever growing problems facing humankind — including, *inter alia*, civil wars, famine, epidemics and pandemics, terrorism, and the evils of globalization and *mondialisation* — are making our United Nations increasingly sought after to solve them. More than ever, the Organization needs the genuine cooperation of each of its Members in support of its efforts to ensure international peace and security, the *sine qua non* for economic and social development. The ongoing participation of the Republic of Chad in the work of this Assembly; its payment of all its arrears, despite its financial difficulties; and the presence of elements of the Chad Armed Forces in the Inter-African Mission to Monitor the Implementation of the Bangui Agreements (MISAB) and, later, in the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic (MINURCA) bear witness to our desire to cooperate with our Organization in the accomplishment of its noble mission. But this effort would never have been possible had we not first sought to stabilize the situation in our own country, which, until recently, was beset by a civil war fuelled by all types of outside interference.

98-85961 (E)

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

In fact, since 1 December 1990, when President Idriss Deby came to power, Chad has resolutely followed the path of national reconciliation and pluralistic democracy. The rule of law has become a tangible reality, based on the Constitution adopted by referendum on 31 March 1996, which was followed by presidential and legislative elections. In order to complete the process of democratization, the Government, together with the National Assembly, is establishing the other institutions provided for in the Constitution.

In this respect, I am pleased to point to the adoption by my country's National Assembly, in early 1998, laws on the Supreme Court and the High Court of Justice. The bill on the Constitutional Council is currently being considered. At its next session, the National Assembly will consider a bill on decentralization.

In the economic sphere, I would note that the extreme poverty in my country is not irreversible, since we have excellent opportunities to emerge from it. This conviction has prompted my Government to take the course of economic and financial reform with the principal goals of restoring the macroeconomic balance, disengaging the State from public enterprise and promoting the private sector. Thus, since July 1995, the Government of Chad has adopted a medium-term strategy for economic recovery. This is aimed at laying the foundations for sustainable economic and social development.

In this framework, a structural adjustment programme has been adopted in order to achieve high and sustained economic growth, reduced external imbalances and strengthened competitiveness. This programme, supported by the International Monetary Fund in the framework of a triennial agreement under its Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility, covering the period 1995-1998, has also enjoyed financial assistance from the World Bank and other multilateral donors.

Apart from our hopes for agriculture and animal husbandry in the fight against poverty, we rely on the important mineral and oil resources beneath Chadian soil. The exploitation of our oil is one of my Government's priorities, because with the expected oil revenue, Chad's income will increase substantially early in the next century, not to mention the fact that the flow of oil investments will also generate important added value for local enterprises.

In this respect, we have tirelessly reaffirmed that oil income will be allocated to the fight against poverty and will help to finance health, social and educational materials; the modernization of agriculture and husbandry; and infrastructure and environment. In other words, the entire population of Chad will benefit from this oil manna.

In this respect, we stress the fact that Chad is one of the rare countries of the world that is managing such a sensitive endeavour as oil exploitation in all transparency. Meetings and seminars with the various sectors of civil society and open parliamentary debates have been organized by the Government in order to explain this endeavour in all its aspects.

Despite the political and economic advances in my country, we deplore the campaign of lies that is being led against my Government. Indeed, for some time now, disinformation and untruths have been spread among the international institutions and some friendly countries about both the oil question and the human rights situation in Chad.

Nonetheless, my country has made considerable progress in the area of human rights. We have ratified the main international instruments relating to human rights and have suppressed all extraordinary judicial procedures, such as the court martial established in 1991. To better guarantee respect for human rights, we have established a national commission for human rights, which chooses at its own discretion the questions to be considered and governs its own activities.

After more than three decades of civil war, foreign interference and ruthless dictatorships, Chad, thanks to the determination of its people, has succeeded in turning the dark pages of its history and in making the necessary institutional reforms for the establishment of a state of law and pluralist democracy, and it now legitimately expects the international community's help in fulfilling the fundamental right of the people of Chad to economic and social development.

In this respect, I solemnly invite friendly countries and international institutions, governmental and non-governmental alike, interested in Chad's development to participate extensively in the Geneva IV round table, to be held from 20-22 October 1998, on strategic development options for Chad for 1998-2001.

Our appeal for the development of our country would be incomplete if we were not to raise a serious subject of concern, the improvement of our environment, which has been endangered by the approximately 1

million mines that infest a large part of our national territory and prevent all development activity. In this respect, we reiterate the appeal for international assistance made here by President Idriss Deby at the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of our Organization and reiterated by our delegation at the fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

Our concerns about domestic policy in no way divert our attention from the international situation. In Africa, we are gratified at the progress made in settling conflicts through negotiation. This applies particularly to Western Africa, under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), particularly in Liberia, Sierra Leone and, more recently, in Guinea-Bissau.

The efforts undertaken in the Central African Republic first by MISAB and then by MINURCA have yielded satisfactory results. My country is proud to have been a participant in these efforts since 1996. We are duty-bound to work towards consolidating peace, which remains fragile in that fraternal neighbouring country. The legislative elections will be an important stage in the peace process, and the elections therefore call for the full support of the international community. A premature withdrawal of MINURCA, before these elections which are but one stage of the process, would endanger the costly efforts made for peace. In these troubling times throughout Central Africa, we appeal for much more patience in order to enable the international community to assist the Central African people even farther along the path of national reconciliation and security, as the United Nations does everywhere.

The strengthening of existing structures for the prevention, management and settlement of conflicts in Africa must be encouraged and firmly supported by the international community, regardless of whether it is a matter for the Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa or the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, located at Lomé, Togo.

Despite the existence of these mechanisms, hotbeds of tension have emerged here and there in Africa, dangerously threatening peace and security on that continent, which more than ever needs peace and security for its economic recovery. Thus, we deplore the persistent situation of war in the countries of the Great Lakes region, and particularly the ravages of war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is urgently necessary that genuine efforts be made by the international community under the aegis of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), with the cooperation of the States of the region, so that the Democratic Republic of the Congo can exercise its right to national reconciliation, the unity of its sons and daughters, its territorial integrity and national sovereignty. This means the withdrawal of the forces of aggression that occupy the entire eastern part of that brotherly country.

With respect to Angola, Chad believes that Mr. Jonas Savimbi is the only party responsible for the deterioration of the situation. We therefore make a heartfelt appeal to the international community and the Security Council to acknowledge the new direction taken by UNITA and to provide it the assistance necessary to promptly achieve the terms of the Lusaka Protocol.

In the Horn of Africa, the armed conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea threatens peace in that part of the continent. The relative calm obtained, thanks to OAU mediation, must be observed in order to facilitate negotiations with a view to a peaceful settlement of the dispute between those two fraternal countries.

Close to those two countries, the situation of latent war in Somalia is far from reassuring. In that country, where the different factions in conflict are sowing terror, war could break out at any time. It is important to make a concerted effort to reintegrate that country into the international community.

The consequences of these hotbeds of tension afflicting the African continent can be measured in the number of homeless people and refugees moving from one country to another in search of a land that will welcome them, not to mention the very high number of innocent victims, including maimed and starving individuals.

Having recently suffered the horrors of war ourselves, our country is keenly aware of the value of peace and appeals to the collective conscience to bring an end to the multiple tragedies affecting innocent African populations.

The same challenges confront us in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the implementation of the Dayton Agreement must be firmly supported so that a lasting peace can be established in that part of the world.

In Afghanistan, Chad urges the Taliban in power in Kabul and the opposition coalition to undertake a frank and sincere dialogue in order to achieve a lasting peace.

In the Middle East, the hope of peace raised by the Oslo accords is fading daily because of the stalled Israeli-Palestinian talks. We urge all the parties concerned to respect their commitments, as this is the only way to achieve a lasting peace in that part of the world. Neither violence nor extremism, much less intransigence, will enable the achievement of a just and definitive solution to this crisis which has lasted too long.

My country, Chad, noted with satisfaction the end of the bipolar world and the radical change that took place in the international situation. By resuming diplomatic relations with the Republic of China on Taiwan, the Government and the people of Chad had only one consideration: to diversify relations of friendship with cooperation with all the peace- and justice-loving countries of the world on the basis of equality and solidarity. Thus Chad gave its support to the request that an examination of General Assembly resolution 2758 (XXVI) of 25 October 1971 be inscribed on the agenda of the fifty-third session, because of the radical changes in the international situation and the coexistence of two Governments, one on each side of the Straits of Taiwan.

We are gratified at the progress, however slow, that has been achieved in recent years in the fields of disarmament and the fight against narcotic drugs. However, we denounce the scandalous trade in conventional weapons which fuel so many conflicts and bring bloodshed to so many parts of the world. We are prepared to support all measures aimed at combating this scourge.

Furthermore, and in the face of the globalization and universalization that is engendering the arrogant triumphalism of the powerful, the international community must rise above the disparities among its members and find adequate ways of overcoming the negative impact on a fragile international balance of the mutations that are currently taking place. In so doing, it must give priority to consensus and agreement among its members and reject unilateral actions conducted in its name but in disdain for the principles and rules that govern it. Therefore, it is urgent that peace- and justice-loving nations speak out to denounce the frequent interferences in the internal affairs of States and take a unanimous stand against the economic sanctions that are often ineffective and are unjust and fraught with social consequences, as well.

For this reason, Chad once again firmly condemns the haste with which unilateral air strikes were made against a simple pharmaceutical factory in the Sudan, causing the loss of innocent lives in that fraternal neighbouring country. In this respect, Chad reiterates its support to the appeal made from this rostrum by the current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to send a fact-finding mission to study the matter.

As for the Lockerbie affair, while we support the resolution of the latest OAU summit, in Ouagadougou, on this question, Chad is also gratified that the United States and Great Britain have agreed that the trial of the two suspects take place in a neutral country. We appeal to those two countries and to the Netherlands to undertake negotiations with Libya, either directly or through the mediation of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in order to conclude an arrangement for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1192 (1998) and thus to establish the modalities for the trial, including measures of security and guarantees for the suspects. These negotiations are indispensable if this question is to be truly resolved.

That being said, may there be no mistake as to the meaning of our policy. We wholeheartedly condemn terrorism in all its forms. The many victims of the recent terrorist actions against the United States Embassies at Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam, as well as the equally tragic reactions that have ensued, force us to reaffirm strongly that no end can justify such recourse to an aggressive and blind fundamentalism.

It is clear that the infinite despair in which millions of human beings are submerged cannot be alleviated by the use of force, wherever it may originate. Furthermore, the radical fundamentalism often inveighed against today is not the preserve of any specific faith. To attribute it lightly to one religion or one people inevitably reduces the scope of the actions undertaken to circumscribe it.

We therefore support the plan for the urgent convening of an international conference under United Nations auspices in order to establish the modalities of an effective international cooperation for the total eradication of terrorism in all its forms.

On another matter which is related to the preceding concerns, we would like to express our deep concern at the present state of international economic relations. It is indeed deplorable to see that the process of detente that is evident in the international political situation and in the globalization of the economy has in no way modified the unequal economic relations, so that the imbalances between rich and poor States are increasingly glaring. If

growth has continued in the developed countries for almost fifty years now, the opposite has taken place in the developing countries, where growth has stagnated, if not regressed. Thus, the eternal problems of indebtedness and deterioration in the terms of trade have been compounded by the problem of the constant marginalization of the developing countries, in particular those of our African continent, on international economic circuits.

In order to achieve the objective of lasting growth and development in the interests of humankind, we invite the international community to work for a system based on rules that are just, fair and more open; for the progressive liberation and elimination of obstacles to trade, in both goods and services; for the rejection of all forms of protectionism; etc. It is therefore urgent that concrete measures be adopted to make it possible for Africa to achieve sustained growth which should lead to real development.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate our complete support for the United Nations both in the maintenance of international peace and security and in the establishment of a just and equitable international order.

But if the United Nations wishes fully to play the role it has been given, it must adapt to the realities of the day. It must be credible and its legitimacy must be undeniable. The Security Council in its current form is far from enshrining these ideals, for two principal reasons: first, its composition does not at all reflect the views of the whole and especially of the least and the smallest; secondly, it pursues a policy based on a double standard, which makes its decisions increasingly vulnerable.

Given this situation, the need for Security Council reform is self-evident. Such reform must respond to the expectations of Member States. This means that there must be a recomposition of the Council as well as a review of its decision-making procedures, in particular the right of veto, which is used and abused. We must reaffirm the position taken by the last Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity: the African continent must be equitably represented in that organ where the fate of all humanity is at stake. It is inconceivable and impossible to accept that an important sector of humanity continues to endure the harshness of decisions in which it did not participate.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Abdel-Elah Khatib, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Mr. Khatib (Jordan) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to congratulate you and the Government and people of Uruguay on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation and gratitude to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, for his successful and distinguished management of the last session.

I would be remiss if I failed to pay tribute as well to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, for his efforts to promote the authority of this Organization and achieve its noble aims and objectives and those of its Charter. I note in particular his report on the work of the Organization, and I emphasize that he may count on the full support and cooperation of my delegation in his efforts to establish peace and security in the world.

Jordan has always believed in the noble aims and objectives of the Charter of the United Nations. We have made every possible effort to maintain international peace and security, particularly in the Middle East, a volatile region whose peoples have, for over half a century, suffered from the scourge of war and from conflicts and disturbances and who have lived under difficult circumstances characterized by confrontation and polarization. Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty King Hussein Ibn Talal, has always been an oasis of security and stability. It has always raised the voice of reason and moderation and as a result has had to shoulder heavy burdens that have exhausted its natural, financial and economic resources and placed an additional strain on its development process.

Throughout the past decades, Jordan has made continuous efforts to achieve a peaceful and honourable settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It continues to strive towards that goal by upholding the peace treaty which it reached with Israel within the framework of the Madrid Conference, and it continues to support efforts to reach an agreement on the Palestinian, Israeli and other tracks.

However, the peace process remains deadlocked, despite the efforts to move it forward, including the initiative being made by the United States on the Palestinian track. As we recognize the centrality of the

Palestinian track as regards the peace process, we value the positive stand taken by the Palestinian leadership and its sincere desire to reach an agreement that would end the deadlock on this track and result in the full and clear acceptance of this initiative.

We therefore demand that the Israeli Government declare its full acceptance of the United States initiative, carry out its commitment under the agreements and remove all obstacles to reaching an agreement on redeployment and other outstanding issues. This would make it possible to achieve real progress on this track with a view to ending the deadlock, resuming and attaining the objectives of the peace process and ensuring the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to establish their independent State on their national territory.

Citing security considerations as pretexts for obstructing actual progress will further undermine the security of every party in the region. Security cannot be enhanced except through a just and honourable peace, one which is convincing to the peoples of the region and one which they can defend.

The occupied city of Jerusalem has been the most important component of the Arab-Israeli conflict throughout its various stages. It is part of the Arab territories occupied in 1967. Therefore, any consideration that apply to those territories also apply to Jerusalem, in particular Security Council resolution 242 (1967).

We call upon Israel to cease and void all actions that would change the status of the Holy City. Under the Oslo accords concluded between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, it was agreed that the final status of the city was to be decided in final status negotiations. Any unilateral actions taken before the conclusion of those negotiations would constitute a violation of the Oslo accords and of all resolutions of international legitimacy. Until the status of the city is finally decided, it should remain open to all adherents of the three divine, monotheistic religions. Jordan has for many years assumed responsibility for maintaining the sanctity of the city of Jerusalem and has also taken it upon itself, under the circumstances of the occupation, to take care of and preserve the Holy Places.

On the other hand, Israel should desist from all unilateral actions against the Palestinian people, such as closures, sieges, arrests, the demolition of homes, the confiscation of land and the building of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. Israel must lift the restrictions that hinder the development of the Palestinian economy and enable the Palestinian people to start establishing normal economic relations with the outside world, free from domination and from economic control. It must also deal with the Palestinian people as its partners in the peace process, partners who are looking forward to living side by side with Israel on the basis of good neighbourliness and equality, not as a people under occupation.

With regard to negotiations on the other tracks, Israel must prove its seriousness about resuming negotiations with Syria and Lebanon from the point at which they ended, ensuring its withdrawal from the Syrian Arab Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, implementing Security Council resolution 425 (1978) by unconditionally withdrawing from southern Lebanon and reaching peace agreements with both of them, on the road towards achieving a comprehensive peace in the region.

Five decades have passed since the tragedy of the Palestinian refugees began. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to carry out its duties towards the Palestinian refugees — a recognition by the international community of its responsibility with regard to this tragedy. However, in recent years UNRWA has been suffering from severe financial crises, which sometimes threaten to suspend or put an end to its services and the completion of its work. We would therefore like to emphasize once again that Jordan attaches the utmost importance to the continuation of UNRWA's work, especially given the fact that Jordan hosts the largest number of Palestinian refugees and provides services to them above and beyond the budget of UNRWA.

Jordan has consistently called for UNRWA to continue its work until the refugee problem is completely resolved through the return of refugees to their land and homes and/or their compensation in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The expiry of the five-year transitional period under the Oslo accords does not mean that UNRWA's mission is over or that there is no longer any need for it to exist. The basic condition for the end of UNRWA's mission is an agreement on a final solution to the refugee problem and on the full and complete implementation of that agreement.

We understand the continued existence of UNRWA and its work from three perspectives: the human, the

political and the legal. To ignore any of them would prejudice international responsibility for the tragedy of the refugees, who have been displaced from their homes. We therefore appeal to the donor countries to continue to make contributions to UNRWA, increasing them as much as possible in proportion to the natural increase in the numbers of refugees and the need to satisfy their basic humanitarian needs. We also appeal to all financially able States to provide the necessary financial support to UNRWA.

We draw your attention to the fact that were UNRWA to stop providing services to refugees, this would in itself constitute an additional obstacle to the peace process, in addition to destabilizing the region through the frustration caused by increased poverty among the refugees and the deterioration of their economic situation.

It is indeed sad that while the world celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights we still talk about the deteriorating situation of the Palestinian refugees and their human basic rights. On this occasion, we are called upon to work for increased commitments to respect and to find an effective international mechanism to implement international instruments relative to human rights, away from selectivity and double standards. We are also called upon to establish a balance between these international instruments, on the one hand, and the national systems and laws in force in various countries of the world, without prejudice to the principle of State sovereignty, on the other. We therefore feel that we should recall the appeal made from this rostrum by His Royal Highness Crown Prince El-Hassan for the establishment of a new international humanitarian order. In this spirit, my country participated and supported the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court in Rome earlier this year.

Cooperation and coexistence among different religious and ethnic groups requires a formula for dialogue among civilizations and religions to replace the concepts of conflict and fear of foreigners which has emerged recently. Dialogue among religions will highlight the common denominators among the different beliefs of the world's peoples and would explain their foundations to the other parties, thereby making it easier to understand and to coexist with one another.

The desired inter-religious dialogue is the best way to confront the incipient manifestations of animosity and the attempts to distort the image of Islam and Muslims, whether those living in their home countries or those who have emigrated to non-Muslim countries. It is necessary to have a deeper understanding of Islam and the Muslims, away from the blind bigotry which leads to unfair generalizations about, and the stereotyping of, over one billion Muslims. From that narrow view, bigotry leads to animosity towards Islam and the Muslims on the basis of actions committed by a minority which is farthest removed from Muslims and the tolerant concepts of Islam.

The question of human rights leads us to mention the continued suffering of the Iraqi people over the past eight years as a result of economic sanctions. While we call upon the Government of Iraq to fully and meticulously comply with all Security Council resolutions, to cooperate fully and constructively with the United Nations towards that end and to commit itself to repatriating Kuwaiti prisoners of war and missing persons, we call upon the international community to relieve the suffering of the Iraqi people. We also emphasize the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of both Iraq and Kuwait.

Other peoples in the region, like the Libyan and Sudanese peoples, have suffered and continue to suffer from sanctions. Others who were not targeted by sanctions have also suffered from the impact of these sanctions. My country, Jordan, was the first to suffer tremendous damage to its economy as a result of the sanctions imposed on Iraq. Nevertheless, we have not only patiently persevered; we have made our best efforts to abide by Security Council resolutions out of respect for international legitimacy.

Weapons of mass destruction constitute a dangerous source of tension and instability. The Middle East region has been afflicted with the existence of these weapons. Perhaps the ideal solution to dispose of weapons of mass destruction and to end the tension and instability caused by their presence is by concluding international treaties establishing zones free from nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in various regions of the world, including the Middle East.

We view with utmost concern nuclear tests carried out recently in South-East Asia in the context of an arms race which, if continued, would have extremely dangerous consequences. A majority of the world's countries have for a long time committed themselves to international guarantees that would prevent the proliferation and use of nuclear weapons. It is very unfortunate that some would depart from this moral

commitment which had previously prevented them from falling into the trap of a vain nuclear arms race in that region. In this regard, we call upon all countries that have not yet done so to accede to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in order to safeguard international peace and security and contribute to the attainment of the goal of general and complete disarmament. This would enable humanity to rid itself of the terror of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

We view with particular sensitivity the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction. Israel possesses and is developing a nuclear-weapons arsenal. The possibility of a confrontation between it and other States that have such weapons or other weapons of mass destruction, such as chemical and biological weapons, makes us live under the threat of these weapons and the dangers of their use at any moment. Therefore we demand that a regional security mechanism be established and that a forum be established to discuss this matter in a way that would ensure the removal of this threat. In this context, there is a need to establish conflict-resolution and conflict-prediction centres in the region to anticipate such disputes before they occur and to prevent them from happening and escalating.

The comprehensive concept of security — a concept that is in conformity with the new developments and concepts that have matured recently, particularly after the end of the cold war and the disappearance of the policy of polarization — has become a wide concept that carries within it all concerns and problems — economic, social, political and humanitarian. These problems may lead to the marginalization and frustration of large sectors of society that would in turn sow the seeds of instability and disturbances which lead to the escalation of existing disputes and the creation of new ones. It would also lead to the growth and spread of terror to a disturbing extent.

Jordan has for so long called for the rooting out of the scourge of terrorism by eliminating its causes and by establishing justice and political solutions, accepted and preserved by peoples. We have also called for confronting terrorism with all the firmness needed and for the concerted and systematic international action required under the umbrella of the United Nations, guided by its Charter, to find appropriate and effective mechanisms to combat terrorism.

We therefore condemn the two terrorist attacks in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam. We also condemn most strongly terrorist acts of all kinds and forms wherever they originate. In this context, it is worth noting the ceaseless efforts made by the Organization of the Islamic Conference, as emphasized at its Twelfth Summit Conference, held at Tehran in December 1997, to establish a code of conduct that would unify State views on terrorism and action by these States to combat and eradicate it.

The General Assembly is meeting while the world witnesses conflicts and struggles in various regions like the Balkans, Asia and Africa. In Kosovo, massacres are still being committed against innocent civilians despite the recent Security Council resolution on that question. In Afghanistan, the Congo and other places, fighting continues despite international efforts to stop the bloodshed and find solutions within the framework of the Charter and the principles of international law.

Peacekeeping operations are among the most important activities undertaken by our Organization for the promotion of world peace, security and stability. Jordan has always believed in the noble goals of these activities and for several years has participated in them.

The world has made important steps towards the disposal of anti-personnel landmines, which every year kill thousands of innocent people and leave thousands more with permanent disabilities, preventing them from exercising their natural right to life. In recognition of the importance of the Convention banning anti-personnel mines, Jordan has decided to accede to it. Her Majesty Queen Noor has sponsored the international effort to rid humanity of this dangerous threat, thereby embodying Jordan's belief in the humanitarian dimensions and the noble goals of the Convention.

During the past few years we have witnessed developments that have left a deep impact on the world economy, including the transition to a market economy, the removal of economic barriers and the trend towards a globalized economy. Such developments place burdens on developing countries and their economies. This requires finding the necessary means to avoid the negative impact of these developments on these countries and to help them adapt their economies to the changes and prepare them to join the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Among these modalities is a commitment by wealthy countries to increase official development assistance, to find comprehensive solutions to the problem of external debt, to integrate developing countries into the world free-trade system, and to improve terms of trade.

As a developing country, Jordan has suffered from economic problems, which grew worse following the Gulf war of the early 1990s. With the help of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Jordan has pursued structural adjustment policies that have resulted in tangible progress. Jordan has succeeded in reducing its budget deficit and the size of its external debt. It has improved its macroeconomic indicators, reformed financial regulations in its banking sector and energized the role of the private sector. Yet we still face a difficult economic situation owing to regional conditions and to the impact on our economy of the crisis in countries of South-East Asia, with many of which we maintain close economic ties. Our exports to those countries have been adversely affected by the crisis.

Improving the economic situation in our region requires the removal of barriers and restrictions that obstruct the flow of goods and services among the countries of the region, and cooperation among those countries in confronting the economic and environmental challenges before us. We are all aware that the problems and challenges we are confronting are increasing in scope and in complexity; most of them defy individual or immediate solution. We need increased cooperation to deal with them on the basis of the interdependence and interrelationship of events throughout the world.

We live in one world, a world in which distances are shrinking and barriers disappearing. For international cooperation in the interest of humanity to be sustainable, we must all avoid confrontation and abide by international law. No State should be above the law. We must therefore foster democracy in the international system; that system should be free of hegemony and inequality. The United Nations should be viewed as the framework of that cooperation; this would build smaller States' confidence in justice.

As we stand on the threshold of the third millennium, we hope that dialogue among peoples and civilizations will be strengthened. We hope that attitudes and actions will be defined by the fact that what we do today will affect future generations. Our concern for future generations obliges us to create conditions that are better than those of the past. We can do this only with mutual understanding and coexistence, and only with the political will to create a better world. We are confident that future generations deserve that from us, and we are confident that we can provide it.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call next on His Excellency The Honourable Thomas Motsoahae Thabane, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lesotho.

Mr. Thabane (Lesotho): I should like, Mr. President, to extend to you our very warm congratulations on your election to lead the business of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. Your election bears testimony to the very high esteem in which we hold you and your country. You can count on our unstinting support and cooperation during the year that lies ahead. Through you, Sir, permit me also to salute your very worthy predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, the former Foreign Minister of Ukraine, for the illustrious manner in which he led the General Assembly at its fifty-second session.

In your address at the opening of this session, Mr. President, you challenged us to focus our attention on the major issues of our time. The list of issues that you provided was comprehensive, but I wish here to highlight only some of them — without passing judgment on their relative worth.

The Secretary-General has submitted a report on causes of conflict in Africa at the request, last year, of the Security Council. It is an excellent report, for which the Secretary-General should be commended. The recent events in Lesotho, to a large measure, fit in with the Secretary-General's diagnosis. Nothing could be closer to the truth than the Secretary-General's observation that

> "Where there is insufficient accountability of leaders, lack of transparency in regimes, inadequate checks and balances, non-adherence to the rule of law, absence of peaceful means to change or replace leadership, or lack of respect for human rights, political control becomes excessively important, and the stakes become dangerously high". (*A/52/871, para. 12*)

Our recent experience in Lesotho is that instability is likely to arise even when Governments are deeply conscious of the need to abide by those prescriptions, if other political players are not similarly committed to them.

On 23 May 1998, a general election was held in Lesotho under the management of an Independent Electoral Commission established with the full cooperation of all political parties. The Commission, a

new institution in the history of Lesotho, was without previous experience. The elections were observed by 400 local and 150 international observers, including observers from the United Nations, all of whom declared them free and fair. Soon afterwards, however, three of the 12 opposition parties alleged that the Lesotho Congress for Democracy had won through fraud. Vice-President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa attempted to mediate in this dispute, and all the parties agreed to an audit of the election results, conducted by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), in order to determine the existence or otherwise of fraud. The Commission of Investigation, which came to be known as the Langa Commission after its Chairman, Justice Pius Langa of South Africa, found that, while there had been administrative irregularities, there had been no fraud and the elections could not be said not to represent the will of the electorate.

But even in the absence of fraud, the opposition parties still insisted on the resignation of the Government, the dissolution of Parliament and the establishment by the King of a government of national unity in which all the major parties would be equally represented. In an attempt to achieve this, the opposition parties perpetrated lawlessness, which resulted in an army mutiny, the forced and illegal dismissal of the command structure by junior officers, and open support by those junior officers for the opposition-led civil unrest in preparation for an illegal takeover of the Government.

It was in this state of virtual *coup d'état* that the Lesotho Prime Minister appealed to the Presidents of Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe for military assistance to restore law and order and to enforce discipline in the Lesotho army. The responsibility was shouldered by the SADC member States Botswana and South Africa on behalf of the entire SADC. While these SADC troops were busy neutralizing the army mutiny and the virtual coup, the supporters of opposition parties embarked on a campaign of arson and looting in the central business district of the capital, Maseru, which later spread to other towns of the country.

Although the full extent of the damage to business infrastructure is not yet known with certainty, preliminary estimates put it at above $200 million. For a small least developed country like Lesotho, such an amount is a heavy burden on an already fragile economy. The Government of Lesotho therefore appeals to the international community for assistance in rebuilding the infrastructure that has been so wantonly destroyed.

We have already made contacts with the World Bank for a more precise assessment of our needs in this regard, and once these are known we shall be making a more focused appeal. Above and beyond the assistance with physical reconstruction, it is quite clear that the type of assistance which the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and some bilateral donors were giving to reorient the minds of our army has not yet had a lasting impact. Lesotho has had a sad history of an army that was deliberately filled with supporters of one political party when that party was in power for over 20 years. As a consequence, our army has had great difficulty in submitting to the authority of a new master. Recent events have underscored the urgent need to overhaul the Lesotho army, as was done under international supervision in Haiti.

Furthermore, all political parties need to submit themselves to the discipline and responsibilities that are demanded of them as actors in the democratic system. This includes the acceptance of defeat in general elections. Otherwise, those politicians who deliberately undermine the democratic culture should be exposed and officially branded by the international community as criminals, as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has done with Savimbi in Angola.

Since 1993, Lesotho has been embarked on a programme of entrenching democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The current crisis has amply demonstrated how difficult it is to make people whose only preoccupation is the achievement of personal political power participate in this process.

The Government of Lesotho is grateful for the support of the countries of SADC in once again reversing a coup in Lesotho. SADC has given practical expression to what has become an all-Africa commitment to the abhorrence of military overthrow of legitimate Governments, such as occurred recently in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The extent of recent lawlessness in Lesotho has underscored the need to control the illicit possession of small arms and light weapons. In Lesotho recently, young people, many of them in their teens, were able to intimidate law-abiding citizens with guns and to force them to surrender Government property and to evacuate Government offices and private industrial enterprises. Small arms and light weapons have become so commonplace that they have encouraged habitual recourse

to violence, thus threatening the cohesion and well-being of many societies. These low-tech, inexpensive and easy to use weapons — numbering hundreds of millions — cause as much as 90 per cent of the deaths in contemporary conflicts. Their proliferation contributes to violence, loss of life and property, social instability, the disruption of economic development and the threat to democratic governance.

During the cold war, arms control and disarmament efforts focused exclusively on major weapons systems, such as tanks, jet fighters and nuclear weapons. Although this has begun to change in recent years, there are still no international standards regarding small arms. Their production, trade and possession remain essentially unmonitored and unregulated. Lesotho therefore strongly supports current efforts to find an international solution to these problems posed by the unregulated proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons.

The Government of Lesotho is understandably disappointed that its efforts to build and consolidate a culture of democratic governance seem to have suffered a setback, especially this year, when we are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, Lesotho will not be deflected from the path it has chosen of moving forward to truly democratic governance in which all citizens enjoy their right to political freedom and personal happiness.

Fifty years ago, the peoples of the world set down standards for their security, happiness and well-being in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the intervening period, the international community and the United Nations have made great strides in the area of human rights. Of great significance are the major human rights treaties which have been adopted and which include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The battle to make human rights truly universal has regrettably not been won decisively, although there is no doubt that we are on the way to achieving that goal. We therefore need to redouble our efforts to pursue it.

In the post-cold-war era, attention has unfortunately been focused almost exclusively on civil and political rights, with less attention being paid to economic, social and cultural rights. That development is a human right is often forgotten. Such a narrow approach misses the important link that exists between the enjoyment of civil and political rights and development. The Declaration on the Right to Development was intended to emphasize such a link but, regrettably, this latest of recognized rights has yet to be factored into our human rights programmes.

As we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, no topic is of greater significance than the establishment of a permanent International Criminal Court. Over 50 years ago, this idea was conceived out of the realization that domestic courts are often inadequate to deter crimes under international law, resulting in impunity for perpetrators of human rights abuses. The adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court less than three months ago was the culmination of a long battle fought by courageous men and women for justice. The Statute is therefore our proud bequest to future generations.

Over the years of negotiation on the Rome Statute, Lesotho always affirmed the need for a court in which we could have faith: an effective, independent and impartial Court that enjoyed universal acceptance. In order to achieve this, a number of thorny and sensitive issues had to be resolved over the five-week period of the Rome Conference. While not everything that we had hoped for has been included in the Statute, we believe that the positive aspects of the Statute far outweigh its negative elements.

If, in the years ahead, there is to be greater respect for international law and international humanitarian law, all States will have to take the International Criminal Court seriously and adopt measures to ensure the coming into operation of the court without delay. We thus urge the Secretary-General to convene the Preparatory Commission in early 1999 to begin work on the rules of procedure and evidence, guidelines for the court on the elements of crimes, the headquarters agreement and other instruments. We also call upon the Assembly to endorse the Rome Statute and urge States to ratify it in sufficient numbers so that the court can start its work. Lesotho remains ready to work towards the accomplishment of these tasks.

During the current session of the General Assembly and the twelfth summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, recently held in Durban, South Africa, the concern of the international community has focused on the phenomenon of globalization, an issue of particular importance for the least developed countries. The liberalization of trade regimes and the promotion of an open and secure multilateral trading system are central requirements for the promotion of economic development.

While the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations has resulted in significant improvements in market access conditions for the majority of countries of the world, the expected gains for the least developed countries from the stimulus to world trade arising from the Uruguay Round are less clear. These countries continue to face significant obstacles to market access for their exports. There are still tariff peaks and tariff escalations against their major export items. Furthermore, some standards are too difficult to meet due to the differences in technological advancement.

The problems enumerated above attest to the importance of the United Nations in shaping a world of peace, prosperity and development. A question that has plagued the United Nations since its founding has been that of disarmament, and in particular nuclear disarmament. Nuclear weapons pose a serious threat to all humanity and its habitat, yet they remain in the arsenals built up during the height of the cold war. Their time has passed, yet assertions of their utility continue. Nuclear weapons are held by a handful of States which insist that these weapons provide security benefits, and yet reserve uniquely to themselves the right to own them. This situation is highly discriminatory, unstable and untenable. The possession of nuclear weapons by any State is a constant stimulus to other States to acquire them. For these reasons, it is a central reality that nuclear weapons diminish the security of all States.

The recent testing of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan was a self-fulfilling prophecy. As much as we deplore the measures taken by these two countries, we must not lose sight of the fact that they have been led down that path by the resistance of nuclear-weapons States to fulfil their obligations towards negotiating in good faith for a total ban of all nuclear weapons. We call upon all nuclear-weapons States to respond to the wishes of all humanity to ban nuclear weapons from human experience by negotiating a binding treaty for such a ban.

Lesotho supports the efforts of the Secretary-General towards reforming the United Nations Organization. There is general agreement that the Security Council must be made more democratic and its working methods more transparent. For the great majority of States, the United Nations is an indispensable tool for the realization of our dream for collective security and development. We are therefore troubled that the efforts to reform the Organization are bogged down in the most crucial area, namely, the reform of the Security Council. The Charter has conferred on that organ the most important responsibility for international peace and security. The Working Group on Security Council reform has been working for almost five years without reaching a conclusion. The time has now come for a negotiating text to be prepared and for negotiations to commence. Otherwise, the whole exercise will turn into a charade in which all will lose interest.

The scourge of conflicts in Africa continues to undermine efforts towards economic and social development in that continent. Lesotho is deeply concerned by the failure of UNITA to comply with the agreed timetable for the resolution of the conflict in Angola, in accordance with the provisions of the Lusaka Protocol and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We thus call on the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to assume its responsibility to apply firmly and resolutely the measures decreed by the Council, especially within the context of resolutions 1135 (1997) and 1173 (1998). Lesotho, as a member of SADC, supports the resolution of the recent SADC summit in Mauritius, which held Mr. Savimbi accountable for the resumption of hostilities in that country and thus declared him a political criminal.

The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is another source of concern to the Government of Lesotho. This situation has seriously jeopardized efforts at consolidating peace, security and stability in the Great Lakes region. Lesotho supports all efforts aimed at promoting a climate of peace and security in that region, including the SADC initiative as carried out by Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola.

Finally, we remain disappointed by the slow pace of efforts at finding a lasting solution to the long-running problem of Western Sahara. We therefore appeal to all parties concerned to respect and commit themselves to the letter and spirit of the United Nations settlement plan, within the context of the Houston accord, so that the people of Western Sahara can at last join the rest of the international community as a peaceful, democratic and stable society as we move across the threshold of the next millennium.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Congo, Mr. Rodolphe Adada, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Adada (Congo) (*interpretation from French*): It is a pleasure for me to convey to you, Sir, the satisfaction of the delegation of Congo at seeing you

conducting our work. Your unanimous election to the presidency of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly not only denotes recognition by the international community of your great qualities as a statesman and experienced diplomat, but also attests to the important role played by your country, Uruguay, in the maintenance of peace in the world.

Mr. President, I wish to convey to you and to the other members of the Bureau our heartfelt, sincere congratulations and to assure you of the full cooperation of the delegation of Congo. I should like also to pay well-deserved tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, for the competence and open-mindedness with which he conducted the work of the previous session.

Finally, I wish to express the appreciation of our delegation to the Secretary-General of our Organization, Mr. Kofi Annan, who, in a world where violence, injustice and frustration predominate, has been tirelessly striving to assert the virtues of dialogue and tolerance and to promote peace and development. Peace and development: these two ideals have for decades posed a major challenge to the international community.

It is very difficult to take the floor after all of the outstanding and talented speakers who have spoken from this rostrum. What more could I add to all of the points so eloquently made about Africa and the rest of the world?

For more than a decade now, Africa has made the headlines only as the result of crises and conflicts: civil wars, inter-State wars, drought, famine and epidemics. All of these obstacles so impede the development of our continent that we cannot but wonder whether Africa will be entering the third millennium on the wrong foot.

Unfortunately, Congo, my country, is an example of this. A year ago, Congo had been in the throes of a civil war for five long months. The international community and our Organization in particular strove hard to find a negotiated solution to the conflict. We wish to pay tribute to the commendable efforts made by the Secretary-General jointly with a numerous African heads of State. Unfortunately, we all know that these efforts were unsuccessful.

We are convinced that respect for the state of law and good governance remain, in a sound economic environment, a prerequisite for the well-being of our peoples. And it is because they did not understand this point that the former ruling class imposed on the peaceful citizens of my country two civil wars in the space of five years, the latest of which — that of 1997 — was the most deadly and the most devastating.

We do not intend to dwell on the many ways the former regime violated the rules of democracy, even if this would be helpful in understanding the causes of the tragic events that my country has experienced.

Today the war is over. Congo is resolutely looking to the future. The future means national reconciliation; it means rebuilding our devastated country; it means resuming the democratic process.

From 5 to 14 January last, a national forum was held at Brazzaville to study practical modalities to attain these goals. That forum, which brought together more than 1,400 participants representing all segments of Congolese society, established a transitional Parliament and set the duration for this transitional period at three years.

The Government of National Unity and Public Salvation is now concentrating on the following priorities: the reconciliation of all the sons and daughters of the country; the rehabilitation of our infrastructure; the restoration of State administration; the resumption of the democratic process — census-taking started again last August; the reorganization of our national economy with, *inter alia*, the privatization of the major State companies; and the resumption of negotiations with international financial institutions, which concluded in June this year with the adoption of a post-conflict programme.

Today, in the light of the results obtained, we can state that the transitional timetable will be respected.

These encouraging results have yet to be consolidated, and our country is still fragile because of the turmoil in the subregion.

The events taking place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo cause great concern to my country, since our stability largely depends on that of our neighbours. I therefore want to reaffirm the Congolese Government's commitment to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Our country will never serve as a base of operations for the destabilization of this fraternal country.

Understanding the costs of civil war and anxious to contribute to finding a political solution to this crisis,

Congo (Brazzaville) has been working with its various contacts among all the States of the subregion. This was the case in Durban during the summit of the Non-Aligned Countries, when President Denis Sassou Nguesso met most of his counterparts, and more recently in Libreville, at the summit of Central African heads of State.

Our country intends to honour its commitments under the relevant provisions of Conventions of the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations relating to refugees and displaced persons. Therefore, I must solemnly repudiate the false allegations by certain media of a supposed agreement between the Governments of the two Congos to transfer displaced Rwandans located in Congo (Brazzaville) to Congo (Kinshasa) so that they can participate in the war. The displaced Rwandans living in Congo (Brazzaville) are in fact under the control of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and any movement of them is taking place without the support of our Government, which wishes to inform the international community that it refuses to accept any responsibility for the consequences.

In Angola the hopes aroused by the Lusaka Protocol have been continually dashed by the bad faith and sudden reversals of position of Mr. Jonas Savimbi, who is thereby taking a whole segment of the Angolan people hostage, denying them the opportunity to pursue development tasks. My country firmly supports the Angolan Government in its efforts to achieve lasting peace in the country and to finalize rapidly and completely the implementation of the Lusaka Accords. My country completely supports the decision adopted by the Southern African Development Community heads of State or Government in Mauritius, describing Mr. Jonas Savimbi as the person solely responsible for the deterioration of the situation in Angola and calling upon other States to refrain from providing any support for Mr. Jonas Savimbi and his militarist wing.

I would like to take this occasion to pay tribute to the memory of Alioune Blondin Beye, a worthy son of Africa, who gave the best of himself, including making the supreme sacrifice, in the search for peace in Angola.

As regards other hot spots, the Congo always advocates negotiated solutions. Therefore, we welcome the ceasefire in Guinea-Bissau, and we hope that it will be used to work out a final solution to that conflict.

The same goes for the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea; in this regard, we support the efforts of the Organization of African Unity mediation committee.

We cannot overlook the crises and tensions prevailing in other parts of the world, notably in the Middle East, where the peace process relaunched by the Oslo Accords is now stalled, but also in South Asia, where the recent nuclear tests conducted by India and then Pakistan have heightened the already high level of tension.

The establishment of just and lasting peace in the world requires full recognition of the destabilizing factors as well as of the real solutions to development problems. One only needs recall the extent to which peace and development are linked.

In the light of the changes in the world, and after more than half a century of existence, the United Nations seems to be gradually and dangerously moving away from the vision of its founding fathers. Solidarity seems to be giving way to a selfishness that has no time for solidarity. This new trend is making increasingly difficult the management of economic questions, which have already been the subject of much thought, without producing any prospect of an improvement in the living standards of the peoples of most of our States.

Violence, famine, disease and poverty continue to afflict our peoples. The underlying causes of these scourges are constantly the subject of a multitude of studies and various economic stimulation and development programmes, but without result, because of a lack of real commitment by the international community. The Agenda for Development, the international strategy for the development of Africa, the Secretary-General's System-wide Special Initiative on Africa — to cite merely those examples — are just so many plans that no longer give reason for optimism.

Today globalization is supposed to be the panacea. This at least is the philosophy of worldwide liberalization. But how can we be confident when the export opportunities for the developing countries are often neutralized by protectionism in a new guise, which uses various pretexts — technical standards, environmental and social concerns, or even concerns about human rights? How can we be confident when official development assistance continues to decline? How can we be sure when the weakest economies are bending beneath the burden of debt?

With regard to Africa, we believe that through economic integration we can mitigate the undesirable

effects of globalization. Through greater solidarity we can hope to meet the challenges we face.

This year the international community is commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is very significant that this anniversary coincides with the establishment of the International Criminal Court, which our Government considers to be a major step forward. We believe that this event puts the finishing touch to the magnificent edifice that the founding fathers began constructing more than 50 years ago.

But today's United Nations is not the same as the old one. Where once there were only a few dozen Member States, today there are 185. The problems of peace and development are not what they were in 1945. It is time to review the management of our communal house. It is time to reform the Organization, including the Security Council. It is time to democratize the Organization in order to better adapt it to the requirements of the coming millennium.

I cannot conclude without expressing the compassion of the Congolese Government and those affected by the calamity now afflicting the Caribbean and the southern United States as a result of hurricane Georges. This wanton unleashing of the forces of nature reminds us that we are all, large and small, in the same boat — our planet Earth — and that we must show solidarity to one another.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call next on His Excellency Mr. Blagoj Handziski, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the former Yusoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mr. Handziski (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): Allow me first of all to congratulate you, Mr. Opertti, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session and, at the same time, to wish you success in the performance of your important function.

Your predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, successfully headed the fifty-second session. I am convinced that, as a distinguished Latin American politician of great experience and energy, you will also make an outstanding contribution to the successful outcome of this session.

Allow me also to express our deep appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his leadership and to extend to him our readiness for full cooperation.

It is my special pleasure to address this Assembly on behalf of the Republic of Macedonia. My country managed to avoid the turmoil of the war on the former Yugoslav territory and to achieve its independence peacefully. We also managed not only to maintain our internal peace and stability but also to produce peace and stability in the troubled and volatile region of the Balkans. Under much more difficult conditions than those prevailing in the other countries in transition, we managed not only to finalize the reforms of the political and economic systems, but also to democratize society, to build the institutions of the state of law and to put into full function the mechanisms of market economy. In addition, we managed to emerge from the deep financial and economic crisis resulting from the high price we had to pay for these radical reforms, and, above all, from the losses we suffered due to the war in the region and the sanctions against our neighbour, Yugoslavia.

According to the last report of the World Bank, the Republic of Macedonia, among all the countries in transition, today shares first place with Estonia in the results on macroeconomic plans and is in fourth place in the field of structural reforms. Over a number of years, my country has had a stable currency and an annual inflation rate of about 5 per cent, and this year has had an industrial production growth rate of over 10 per cent. The Republic of Macedonia, through its policy of equally good relations with all its neighbours, has managed to establish outstanding relations with almost all of them, particularly with the Republic of Slovenia, the Republic of Croatia, the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Turkey, the Hellenic Republic and the Republic of Albania. It has also managed to become one of the most active countries in all of the regional initiatives in South-Eastern Europe.

Having committed itself to full integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures, the Republic of Macedonia is investing great efforts to enhance its relations with the European Union and to fully integrate itself into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), thus contributing to the establishment of the new Euro-Atlantic security architecture and to the united Europe of the twenty-first century.

The Republic of Macedonia has achieved all of this in a region in which, as is well known, we cannot yet speak of lasting peace and stability, due to the crisis in Bosnia, the crisis in the Yugoslav province of Kosovo, the recent events in Albania and the stalled processes of democratization in some of the neighbouring countries.

Other factors are the threats posed by illicit drug-trafficking, money-laundering, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and small arms, transnational and local terrorism and so forth.

These are only some of the issues that burden the overall situation in the region I come from, but these are also issues that burden citizens worldwide. We still live in a period characterized by uncertainty and unpredictability. Local wars and ethnic conflicts continue. The threat of weapons of mass destruction is increasingly alarming. Organized crime, illicit drug-trafficking and terrorism trouble the whole world. Financial and economic crises have become more frequent than ever, as have environmental disasters.

These complex issues, together with the issue of globalization, which marks the end of this century and will prevail in the coming one, as well as the issue of the reform of our Organization, are the main issues of debate at this session. That is why my country, the Republic of Macedonia, attaches such enormous importance to this session, with the expectation that the decisions to be adopted in those respects will improve our mutual cooperation and will strengthen the role of the United Nations in the spirit of its Charter.

In the twenty-first century, our Organization will face a lot of new challenges, which will differ from those we have dealt with during the past decades. The appropriate response to these challenges requires even further globalization of cooperation, through the United Nations, and we therefore should, in due time, do everything possible so that it will be prepared to tackle them.

We believe that the Secretary-General's reform programme is an excellent basis for this. These reforms are in the interest of all Member States, and we therefore fully endorse them. We believe that they should bring about substantial improvement in the work of all the bodies within the United Nations family.

In that regard, we are in favour of the eventual increase in the number of permanent and non-permanent members of the Security Council, derived from and based upon real political relations among Member States.

The processes of globalization that have engulfed our planet are irreversible. They enhance our possibilities for confronting international threats jointly, but they should also provide benefits for all participating countries. The United Nations is the only Organization which can define the principles, norms and rules, and which can give guarantees that both the obligations and the benefits will be shared by all members of the international community. Only in this way can we, all together, avoid the eventual negative effects of these processes of globalization.

As a modest contribution in that regard, the Republic of Macedonia has submitted a draft resolution for this session on the prevention of marginalization of small and weakened economies of developing countries and of economies in transition.

The international community is witnessing many new crises and conflicts, which most frequently turn into violence of an unprecedented intensity and fierceness. The United Nations has all along been engaged in their prevention and management. The lessons learned from the crisis of the region I come from have indicated that our Organization, in dealing with them, needs to take the following steps: first, concentrate on their root causes; secondly, concentrate on early warning; thirdly, activate preventive diplomacy for peaceful settlement of these disputes before violence arises; and fourthly, deploy preventive forces in the neighbouring regions or countries to prevent their eventual spillover.

In 1992, when the war in Bosnia was spreading, endangering the regions to the south, as well as my country, which was not yet a Member of the United Nations, we requested the deployment of a preventive mission along our northern and western borders. The Security Council took a positive decision, and, as a result, the first preventive United Nations mission, the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP), was born.

I avail myself of this opportunity to express the gratitude of my people and my country for this wise decision of the Security Council, to the troop-contributing countries — the United States of America, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark — and to all the other countries that have contributed to the stabilization of the situation along our northern and western borders.

As members know, the UNPREDEP mission has all along also acted as a deterrent to possible conflicts in the region. This most successful preventive mission has always enjoyed the support of our citizens, as well as of my Government. We are particularly pleased that such positive assessments are contained in all the reports of Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

We are convinced that last year's crisis in Albania and the crisis in Kosovo, which has particularly intensified since the beginning of this year, would have had much more negative consequences on peace and stability in the region had the UNPREDEP mission not stayed in the Republic of Macedonia or had its stay been terminated last year, as some had proposed. Therefore, I would like to express our gratitude to all the States members of the Security Council that adopted the resolution extending its stay.

I would also like to point to the need for the UNPREDEP mission to stay in the Republic of Macedonia until the situation in neighbouring Albania stabilizes and the Kosovo crisis is peacefully settled. As an immediate neighbour, we are most interested in this and therefore, through our constructive policy, we are trying to make our own contribution to the efforts of the international community to resolve the Kosovo crisis.

Even though we see the solution in the framework of the Republic of Serbia and within the internationally recognized borders of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, it is well known that conditions have not yet been created for a lasting settlement. Therefore, we believe that the interim solution proposed by the American diplomat Christopher Hill and the Contact Group will lead towards resolving this crisis. The sooner this temporary solution is accepted and implemented, the sooner will conditions be created for reaching a lasting settlement of the crisis in Kosovo, as well as for eliminating this threat to the stability of the region.

Should this not happen, as an immediate neighbour we are most concerned by possible new waves of refugees, which could destabilize not only the countries of the region, but also those beyond. For the time being, this crisis has not significantly affected the peace and stability of the Republic of Macedonia, in which there lives a considerable Albanian minority. However, all of our citizens, regardless of their national or religious identity, are concerned by a possible deepening of the crisis.

Though some initial steps have lately been made towards settling the Kosovo crisis and broader conditions have been established to that end — such as, for example, the decision of the Defence Ministers of the Partnership for Peace and of States members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) from South-East Europe, to establish the first multinational brigade for peace support operations; or the positive results of such regional initiatives as the Central European Initiative (CEI), the Royaumont Initiative, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Initiative of Cooperation of South-East Europe (SECI), and the process on security, stability and cooperation in South-Eastern Europe — recent events in Kosovo, in which a number of citizens were massacred, will very negatively affect the overall security situation. We condemn all such uncivilized acts and underline that this is not the way to overcome the disputes or to settle them peacefully.

Therefore, we call for the full mobilization and harmonization of the activities of the international community, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union and NATO, as well as our Organization, the United Nations, since we believe that the possibilities for a peaceful solution have not yet been exhausted. In that regard, my country has invested great efforts to make a constructive contribution. As is known, at previous sessions of the General Assembly, three resolutions for the development of good-neighbourly relations in South-East Europe that were proposed by the Republic of Macedonia were adopted unanimously.

At this session, we have submitted a proposal for the adoption of a new draft resolution on the prevention of the violent disintegration of States. I hope that this draft resolution will also be adopted by acclamation. By this, the Republic of Macedonia is making a concrete contribution and giving strong support to the efforts of the United Nations to establish early warning of eventual conflicts, achieve political settlements of outstanding disputes, and avoid their short-, medium- and long-term consequences.

In the period between the main parts of the fifty-second and fifty-third sessions of the General Assembly, our Organization undertook a great number of activities to resolve the current and to prevent the outbreak of new crises. The measures that could greatly contribute to preventing such violent conflicts certainly include the prosecution of war criminals and the punishment of the criminal acts and atrocities they have committed.

The successful completion of the Conference on the creation of the International Criminal Court is of historical importance. The Republic of Macedonia has fully supported the outcome of the Rome Conference, as well as the Statute that was adopted by the majority of the attending countries, including my own. Now, the General Assembly should adopt the necessary decisions to allow the Court to assume its full functions.

In that regard, no less important is the fact, that within a very short period of time, 40 countries, including the Republic of Macedonia, have ratified the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. Thus, the Republic of Macedonia has firmly reaffirmed its commitment to the full elimination of anti-personnel landmines, just as it has, by investing enormous efforts, made a great contribution to preventing the proliferation of the small arms that abounded in the region following last year's crisis in Albania.

Human rights, democracy and the rule of law have proven to be the basic preconditions for the promotion of peace, security and the sustainable development of States. Since the very first days of its independence, the Republic of Macedonia has committed itself to the establishment of these preconditions.

Today, as we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we feel the need to particularly emphasize that the adoption of the declaration on the defenders of human rights will not only create new responsibilities for all the States Members of our Organization, but will also encourage all the activists who work for the protection of human rights throughout the world.

As a country whose Constitution abolishes the death penalty, we support the draft protocols to the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention against Torture, as well as a broad scope of projects and programmes in the field of human rights, the rule of law and so on.

Allow me to conclude by reaffirming the firm commitment of the Republic of Macedonia to the objectives and principles of the United Nations Charter. We are a small country that struggles for progress and development within a still troubled and unstable region. Perhaps that is why we so strongly feel the threats and the challenges that are common to the whole world. Thus, each and every State Member of the United Nations, regardless of size and human potential, should make its contribution to decreasing the risks of these threats and should also enjoy the benefits of the current processes of globalization. The survival of each State, of each people, of the whole planet depends on the common solidarity among all of us and on our common responsibility for future generations that could be united only here, in our common Organization, the United Nations.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker on my list is the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uganda, His Excellency The Honourable Eriya Kategaya.

Mr. Kategaya (Uganda): At the outset, I wish to convey the apologies of President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, who was supposed to address the Assembly. He is unable to come to New York because of other pressing State duties.

Allow me, on behalf of my delegation, to convey our warm congratulations to you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. Let me pay a special tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko of Ukraine, for the excellent manner in which he presided over the work of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. I wish also to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for all the endeavours he is undertaking in shaping our Organization to enable it to effectively meet the challenges of the next millennium.

Mr. Filippi Balestra (San Marino), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The United Nations has been at the forefront of efforts to tackle problems of international peace and security and social and economic development. It has helped many communities around the world attain peace, greater security and higher standards of living. Africa faces a number of challenges which must be urgently addressed. It is a volatile region in which a multiplicity of conflicts have combined to create a very explosive atmosphere. Refugee populations have multiplied to provide a further recipe for future instability. The situation has been further complicated by large numbers of internally displaced people. Indeed, a large political and humanitarian tragedy is taking place in the region. There is therefore an urgent need for the international community to support Africa's efforts to address the fundamental causes of the conflict.

It has been alleged that ethnic differences are the prime causes of conflict in the region. My delegation does not share this view. We believe that poor leadership, poverty and low levels of economic development in the region are the main underlying causes. The leadership in our region must correctly define and analyse the root causes of the problems and establish clear priorities. It is also imperative that, for a permanent and durable peace to prevail in the region, a

comprehensive programme of economic recovery and development be implemented in Africa. Concerted efforts must therefore be made to reduce and ultimately eradicate poverty in the world.

In this regard, Uganda had the honour of hosting a leaders' forum in Kampala in January this year at which the heads of State and Government of countries in the eastern, southern and central regions of Africa met and held discussions with the President of the World Bank. That meeting, which in many ways was unique and inspiring, opened a new chapter in Africa's relations with the Bank. It ushered in a genuine spirit of partnership between Africa and the Bank. Two of the significant outcomes of the meeting were, first, the decision that Africa would be considered a priority development region by the World Bank and, secondly, a commitment to depoliticize foreign aid. It was also agreed at the meeting that African countries must set their own priorities for development. It is the hope of my delegation that the agreements reached at the Kampala leaders' forum will be translated into concrete action by the international community in the near future. We believe that similar initiatives could be undertaken together with other organs of the United Nations system.

For too long, international efforts have been expended on short-term humanitarian programmes, ignoring the long-term requirements for sustainable peace and development. Past experience has shown that this approach cannot ensure durable peace and development. Indeed, as the Secretary-General noted in his report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa,

> "Preventing such wars is no longer a matter of defending States or protecting allies. It is a matter of defending humanity". (*A/52/871, para. 3*)

Conflict prevention, including post-conflict peace-building, requires a sustained effort to infuse funds into the region. In this regard, we urge serious consideration and expeditious implementation of the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report.

The massive cuts in social spending and public investments, with the attendant high levels of unemployment, create new centres of discontent and thus further fuel the embers of conflict. Attempts to impose conditionalities which are antithetical to the peace process and the cutting off of aid from weak Governments making sincere efforts to pursue reconciliation or implement peace agreements have been counterproductive. My delegation would wish to argue for "peace-friendly" structural adjustment programmes, if durable peace and sustainable development are to be achieved in Africa and elsewhere.

A number of delegations have expressed their views on the situation in the Great Lakes region with specific reference to the ongoing crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. My country was specifically accused of involvement in the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The facts of the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are not clear to some member States of this Assembly. Since many speakers have raised this issue, we would like to make the following clarifications.

Uganda's interest in the situation in the Great Lakes region has always been and is still based on the following: the need to ensure total security in all parts of Uganda and the protection of the lives and property of the people of Uganda; and the desire to ensure maximum stability in the Great Lakes region, because instability in any neighbouring country directly affects our security and economy.

These concerns are legitimate. Our position on this crisis therefore reflects our efforts to pursue those interests. Before the fall of former President Mobutu, it was not possible for Uganda to get cooperation from the then Government in Zaire to ensure that Zairian territory was not used by terrorist organizations to create insecurity along the Uganda-Zaire border and inside Uganda.

When President Laurent Kabila came to power it was mutually agreed between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo that our two armies would jointly operate in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to contain and eventually remove the bandits who were using the bases they had in the area to destabilize Uganda. Pursuant to that understanding, Uganda has since maintained a military presence in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in accordance with the provision of the bilateral agreement between our two countries. The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo today necessitates that Uganda must maintain that military presence, which is crucial for the security of our country and our people.

Let me make it clear to all and sundry that Uganda has no territorial designs on the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is not the primary responsibility of Uganda

to dictate the political arrangements of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, any internal arrangement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo which does not take into account the legitimate security concerns of its neighbours is our concern. We would like to say that unilateral military intervention by individual countries or sectional intervention by groups of countries is unacceptable. These actions are likely to escalate the problem. If there are good reasons for an intervention, it should be regional, carried out, for example, through the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Organization of African Unity (OAU) or even the United Nations, and in the context of the peace initiatives that are already in place.

We would therefore like to stress that there are serious regional efforts to address the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We believe these efforts should be supported by the entire membership of this Organization and by all parties that are interested in the conflict and have a vested interest in peace and security in the Great Lakes region.

Uganda's commitment to the full respect for and universal enjoyment of human rights is well known. However, we regret that crimes are now being committed on a daily basis against the people of Uganda by surrogate forces of the so-called Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) with the full knowledge and assistance of their sponsors, who do not believe in freedom and respect for human rights. Innocent children are abducted daily, subjected to forced labour and military service and made victims of other, similar crimes, with the support of the sponsors of these terrorist groups. The world awoke to this horrendous crime at the fifty-fourth session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, when it adopted draft resolution E/CN.4/1998/L.40, which calls upon the LRA and its sponsors to release all the abducted children immediately and unconditionally.

My delegation believes that without external support the Lord's Resistance Army would not be in a position to commit these atrocities and defy international public opinion on this extremely important matter. We call upon the international community to intensify pressure on the countries involved to stop backing these terrorists. On the other hand, we wish to thank the United Nations bodies, non-governmental organizations and all others who have been involved in seeking the freedom of these children. We hope their efforts will not be in vain.

The United Nations is a vibrant institution for many reasons, among them its unwavering support for actions aimed at advancing freedom, peace and security. Today, terrorism poses a serious threat to these values. Individuals and organizations whose stock in trade is the violation of these values roam the globe with impunity. Recent attacks in East Africa came at a time when we thought the world had learned the futility of such senseless, wanton murder and destruction. It is the firm belief of my delegation that the international community should collectively take action to deny sanctuary to these savages. Countries known to harbour such elements should be isolated and punished severely so that human freedom can be protected. My delegation further believes that this is an opportune moment to convene an international conference on terrorism which must map out strategies to deal with this escalating problem.

Last year the world had only five declared nuclear States; today we have seven; next year we may have more. In essence, such non-proliferation agreements as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) have not deterred the emergence of new nuclear States.

The philosophy of dependence on nuclear weapons for security is, in a creeping and disturbing fashion, becoming universal. This situation is creating new dangers for the survival of mankind. My delegation believes that a new universal security doctrine needs to evolve. All nuclear weapons should be eliminated. In line with this belief, my delegation calls for the adoption of an action plan for the elimination of all nuclear weapons within a time-bound framework. Such an approach should be universal, and not regional or discriminatory, if it is to achieve the desired goals.

Since the last session of the General Assembly, several developments have taken place in the international arena, some of which have offered hope and encouragement, while others have led to destruction and despair.

The issue of Western Sahara is of concern to my delegation. We are concerned by the slow progress towards the holding of a United Nations-supervised referendum on the self-determination of the people of that territory. We appeal to the parties to overcome their differences and allow a just and impartial referendum to take place.

On the Lockerbie incident, Uganda welcomes the initial moves taken in a bid to solve the problem between the United States of America and the United Kingdom on the one hand and Libya on the other. We encourage the Secretary-General to work out comprehensive and clear arrangements, acceptable to all concerned parties, so that the matter can finally be resolved.

Today we live in a globalized world. Globalization has created new opportunities as well as grave risks and challenges. Its impact has strengthened the developed countries and weakened the developing countries. Such a situation does not augur well for international peace and security. There is an urgent need for deliberate policies to reorient international trade and finance. The crisis in South-East Asia should serve as a warning to the world of the catastrophe that inaction will breed. The ever widening gap between the developed and the developing countries and among countries in the South could also become a source of future instability. There should be no delay in addressing these problems. My delegation calls upon the developed countries to honour their obligations and increase the transfer of resources to the developing countries for the transformation of their economies, so that they may become equal partners in the global economy.

In the recent past, despite drastic limitations in both human and financial resources, the United Nations has responded admirably to the challenges of the era, including peacekeeping, emergency operations and development. It has a commendable record which should serve to strengthen our confidence in the Organization.

As we inch our way into the twenty-first century, we should translate this confidence into the necessary political will to strengthen the Organization. We should demonstrate our faith and dedication to the United Nations and its component parts by providing it with the resources necessary to fulfil its immense mandate. Our challenge is to bequeath to succeeding generations a strong United Nations, able to guarantee the principles enshrined in the preamble of its Charter.

The Acting President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Sierra Leone, His Excellency Mr. Sama Banya.

Mr. Banya (Sierra Leone): Permit me to offer, on behalf of President Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and the Government and the people of Sierra Leone, our warm felicitations to Mr. Didier Opertti on his unanimous election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, and to express our delegation's confidence that under his able guidance our session will be a successful one. We are in no doubt that his distinguished public record adequately equips him for the position he has been called upon to assume, and we have already seen evidence of this in the last two weeks. We must also express gratitude to his predecessor, Mr. Udovenko of Ukraine, for a job well done.

Our gratitude also goes to Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General, and to the entire staff of the United Nations common system for their relentless efforts in helping the people of Sierra Leone in the mammoth task of reconstruction, rehabilitation and resettlement of hundreds of thousands of our compatriots who were the unfortunate victims of nine months of junta misrule. Mr. Annan has put the international ship of state on the right course, and my delegation wishes him continued success.

This time last year, my President addressed the Assembly on the subject of the situation in Sierra Leone. I am sure most members will remember the picture he painted of the tragic events and the turmoil that followed when a democratically elected Government was overthrown by a bunch of military adventurists, aided and abetted by some civilian opportunists who became their active collaborators. Thanks to the resilience of the whole of civil society, encouraged and backed by the international community, I am here today representing the legitimate, reinstated Government of Sierra Leone.

Against all odds, our people defied the violent and misguided gun-toting anarchists who appeared to have one objective, and one only: the total destruction of the civil society of Sierra Leone. Mercifully, that nightmare is now behind us.

In February this year, the forces of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), under the then ECOWAS Chairman, the late General Sani Abacha of Nigeria, led by Nigeria and with the support of our Civil Defence Unit, removed the junta. This was preceded by several attempts to arrive at a negotiated settlement. The international community was to learn that the junta and their allies, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), always negotiated in bad faith and were not to be trusted.

The atrocities committed by the junta during their nine-month reign, especially after they retreated to the eastern and northern parts of the country, had to be seen

to be believed. Rape, murder, mutilation, vandalism and the burning down of whole villages were the order of the day. Unarmed civilians, particularly women and children, were their unfortunate victims.

Because of the wanton destruction perpetrated by the junta and, much earlier, by the RUF, there is a great need to revamp the economy and for reconstruction. In a report to the General Assembly, the Secretary-General referred to the Special Conference on Sierra Leone, which he convened here at United Nations Headquarters on 30 July this year. The international community was invited to focus on the situation in Sierra Leone.

We were very much encouraged, not only by the deliberations and results of that conference, but also by the deliberations of the second ministerial-level Security Council meeting on Africa, held last week, in which Sierra Leone featured prominently.

The humanitarian crisis is immense: there are many refugees and displaced persons. The disarmament and demobilization exercise and the resettlement, rehabilitation and reconstruction processes require many resources. Some of the pledges that were made are now being fulfilled, but much remains to be done.

Allow me to echo the appeal of the Secretary-General to those who have yet to pledge, and to others who have yet to deliver, to do all they can to help us. In the meantime, I would like to express profound gratitude to all members, and especially to the members of the contact group to be coordinated by the United Kingdom, for what has been achieved so far.

As soon as the legitimate Government was overthrown, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), at its meeting in Harare in June 1997, unanimously condemned the takeover and called on the junta to return power and constitutionality to the elected Government and to the country respectively. The prompt action of ECOWAS, the resultant peace in Liberia and now the return of democracy to Sierra Leone, clearly demonstrate what a regional organization can achieve if the determination and the leadership are there. ECOMOG has the capacity to deliver, but it needs the tools, which only the international community can provide.

My country is fully aware that even though the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC)/RUF junta has been ousted, the peace and security that were achieved with enormous sacrifice by the people of Sierra Leone have yet to be consolidated. It is therefore in the interests of the people that the international community in general and the forces of the subregion in particular, maintain their presence in Sierra Leone until we can create a new national army. In this regard, the Federal Republic of Nigeria has agreed to the secondment of Brigadier-General Maxwell Khobe, Commander of the ECOMOG Force in Sierra Leone, as our Chief of Defence Staff. He is already working on the modalities for forming a well-trained and dedicated army which will be alive to its responsibility as defender of our Constitution. I have every reason to believe that that assignment will be carried out with the same professionalism that has been the hallmark of ECOMOG operations in both Liberia and Sierra Leone.

At this juncture, I would like to state that the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone is committed to the demobilization, disarmament and integration of all ex-combatants, as provided for in both the Abidjan Peace Accord and the Conakry peace plan, despite the lack of good faith that has been demonstrated by both the RUF and the junta. This programme is at the top of our post-conflict agenda, and the Disarmament Committee itself is under the chairmanship of no less a person than our President.

Because of its overwhelming desire to uphold the principles of democracy and good governance, the Government lays much emphasis on the rule of law, human rights and freedom of expression. There are over 48 newspaper publications in a country with 80 per cent illiteracy. Despite propaganda to the contrary, no journalists have been prosecuted, let alone convicted, for practising their profession — not even when the headlines of a few have sometimes bordered on libel. Of the 16 people recently convicted of treason, after a trial that was declared transparent and fair, five were journalists; but they were not charged for the practice of journalism.

President Kabbah and the ECOMOG Force Commander informed the Special Conference on Sierra Leone that more than 90 per cent of the country was secure and safe. Remnants of the junta and the RUF are, however, perched in small areas in the east and north-east and operate only because they continue to have a safe haven in a neighbouring country, while one other country renders its support to them from outside Sierra Leone. That notwithstanding, every effort is now being made by both ECOMOG and the Civil Defence Unit to flush them out and to finally put this whole tragic affair behind us.

The treason trials of both civilians and former junta members are still in progress, under laws which have been in existence since independence. Soon after sentence was passed on the first group, some misguided organizations began unfairly pressurizing the President to intervene; they even mounted a vicious propaganda campaign in the name of human rights.

My country is governed by the rule of law. Under our constitution there is separation of powers between the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. While the due process of law is in progress, the President cannot and will not interfere with it. At the end of the exercise those who lose their final appeals to the Supreme Court can apply to the Prerogative of Mercy Committee. Then, and only then, will the President step in, and he has already given that assurance.

Our President has not only gone the extra mile, but is seen to be bending over backwards to bring together all the main political groups into the mainstream of the post-conflict nation-building exercise, so as to secure permanent peace and security. There have been no instances of human rights violations since President Kabbah assumed office.

With regard to the armed rebellion in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the rebel wars in Angola, Sudan and elsewhere, we appeal to the parties in those conflicts to lay down their arms, to refrain from further provocative activities that ignite tempers and to give peace a chance.

Our Government welcomes the successful outcome of the United Nations Diplomatic Conference on the establishment of the International Criminal Court, which took place in Rome, Italy, in June 1998. Sierra Leone is firmly committed to the early establishment of a permanent international court, and my Government has already signed the Statute of the International Criminal Court. We urge every nation to sign and ratify the Statute. It will be not only testimony to the common desire to overcome long neglected failures of national legal systems, but a unique chance to contribute to international stability deterrence and, hopefully, the prevention of atrocious crimes.

Security Council reform is one of the most difficult issues which have to be tackled during this session. While progress has been made in some areas, and new ideas and proposals have emerged, the Working Group has not presented recommendations to the General Assembly. Sierra Leone agrees with the position of the Non-Aligned Movement on the curtailment, limitation and subsequent elimination of the veto. Sierra Leone fully endorses the decision of the Assembly of the Heads of State or Government of the Organization of African Unity for two permanent seats to be allocated to our continent.

As for the expansion of the Security Council, Sierra Leone supports the position taken by the Non-Aligned Movement, that, in order to enhance its credibility, the new Council should reflect the universal character of the world and correct existing imbalances in its composition.

My country cannot talk of conflicts and peace without referring to nuclear arms. When negotiations were being conducted in Geneva on a comprehensive test-ban treaty, a few years ago, the Republic of Sierra Leone was one of those countries which prayed silently for its success. We are relieved and thankful that the Treaty has been signed by a large number of countries. We continue to call on all nations to sign the test-ban treaty and refrain from further tests, with their attendant danger to the future of mankind.

In the same way as we oppose all future nuclear tests, we must with all the emphasis at our disposal condemn all forms of terrorism, both domestic and international. We refer particularly to the recent bombings which claimed the lives of hundreds of innocent people, not to mention the loss of property worth millions of dollars in Nairobi, Dar-es-Salaam, Cape Town and Northern Ireland. We call on the international community to coordinate its efforts to fight this menace. Those who insist on using this method to achieve their aims should be tracked down and brought to justice. In this regard, my country wholeheartedly supports the signing and ratification of all the Conventions on terrorism and appeals to the entire international community to adhere to the Conventions in order to make the world a safer place for our children's children.

My Government noted with great delight the conference convened last year in South Africa to focus the world's attention on the dangers posed to human life by landmines. We revive the memory of the late Princess Diana, who did so much to focus the attention of the international community on the horrors of landmines. In our own country, too, landmines were strewn around with carefree abandon by the AFRC/RUF junta, resulting in the maiming and death of innocent civilians, especially children.

Many African and other third world countries, including my own, are today still grappling with severe economic problems. The effects of the debt burden, the unfavourable balances of trade and payment, and the unpredictability of the prices of their products on the world market have all contributed to the deteriorating economic conditions they are facing. In addition to these external factors, misguided policies and political instability caused by various kinds of civil strife have caused their economies to sink further. Globalization and trade liberalization have become inevitable phases in world trade. It has, however, become obvious that our countries have fared badly and will continue to be at a disadvantage unless there is a change of attitude and even procedure on the part of developed, industrialized countries. The resultant imbalances can be overcome if every effort is made to create a level playing field by removing the debt burden of our countries and opening up markets to African and third world products. Some countries have already done so; we hope that others will follow soon.

I have already mentioned the refugee situation in my own country. It is grim, and yet the situation is the same in other parts of the world, especially Africa, which has the largest refugee populations. This situation has continued to exert tremendous pressure on the already weak economies of the host countries, which are forced to spend part of their meagre resources on the welfare of refugees. Having gone through this experience both as recipient and exporter of refugees, we must commend the donor community and especially the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Much is being done for us, but even the Office acknowledges that the situation of our refugees in neighbouring countries is desperate. I would like to appeal to the donor community to shed its donor fatigue syndrome and continue to respond positively to the needs of a people who are the innocent victims of events not of their own making. A very urgent need now is for the repatriation of our people from neighbouring countries, where life in camps is now a nightmare.

Sierra Leone is one of the countries in our subregion that still have the remnants of what were once the Upper Guinea rain forest, which stretches from Sierra Leone down to the Cameroons. The reserve supports the largest number of animal species in Sierra Leone: a total of 46 mammal species, including Western chimpanzees, red colobus monkeys, Diana monkeys, duickers, leopards and forest elephants. Two hundred and seventy four species of birds are to be found in the Gola rain forest. These include 10 globally threatened species — 8 restricted to the Upper Guinea forest block — and 169 forest-dependent species. There is a very rich diversity of interesting invertebrates, including two species of dragonfly, endemic only to parts of the Upper Guinea forest, as well as the rare African swallow-tailed butterfly, which has Sierra Leone as the westernmost limit of its range in Africa.

Unfortunately, the Gola rain forest, like most other forest areas on the continent, is under considerable pressure. Much of the forest cover is lost annually from logging and from brush burning as well as shifting cultivation carried out by an ever-increasing population. Conservation of these forests in Sierra Leone, as in other parts of Africa, is linked with poverty. The Forestry Division of our Ministry of Agriculture and the Environment has a Gola Rain Forest Conservation Programme. The programme is being operated in collaboration with a local non-governmental organization, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone, the Sierra Leone partner of Birdlife International, which sponsors the programme.

Notwithstanding this valuable work, pressure on forests in the third world will not be reduced unless we enhance food production from the same piece of land year after year, as happens in the industrialized countries. This can only be achieved by a transfer of food production technology to our own countries.

I have made frequent references to the role of the international community in the restoration of democracy to my country and to the reinstatement of President Kabbah. I have mentioned the United Nations, the OAU, ECOWAS and the Commonwealth. I would like to make special reference to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The restoration of constitutional order and the various efforts of the Government to effect durable peace and to rebuild the country provide us with an opportunity to regain donor confidence and ensure the completion of various initiatives and programmes interrupted by the events of the coup of 25 May 1997.

As lead agency in the partnership between the Government and the donor community, the UNDP, prior to the coup, had spearheaded the following: preparation of a national poverty-eradication programme; facilitating the establishment of a coordination mechanism for relief assistance by the humanitarian community; and facilitating the peace process through the provision of diplomatic, logistic, technical and administrative support

to the peace negotiations and the preparation of the demobilization programme. Since the return of the elected Government in March 1998, the UNDP has spent considerable amounts of money in the development of various other programmes as well. I urge the international community to continue its support for these programmes and to help us in our task of rehabilitation.

Let me close by referring again to the report of the Secretary-General, whom I have already thanked. I shall refer once more to the special conference he convened, for which I thank the Secretary-General.

The Acting President: The next speaker is His Excellency Mr. Casimir Oye Mba, Minister of State, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Gabon.

Mr. Mba (Gabon) (*interpretation from French*): I wish first to convey to Mr. Didier Opertti the warm, sincere congratulations of the Government and the delegation of Gabon on his well-deserved election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. This is a tribute to his country, Uruguay, and an unambiguous recognition of his personal and professional qualities. Our congratulations go also to all the other Assembly officers, and we wish them every success in guiding our work. We assure them of the support and cooperation of the delegation of Gabon.

To the President of the General Assembly at the fifty-second session, Mr. Hennadiy Y. Udovenko, who spared no effort in carrying out his responsibilities, I convey our satisfaction and our deep gratitude.

The present times are characterized by political tension, by change and by socio-economic upheaval exacerbated by a grave financial crisis; our involvement is required, in more than one respect. Gabon remains convinced that the United Nations continues to be the best forum for working together to harmonize our different approaches towards peace and development. We owe it to ourselves to consider the circumstances in which the Organization was established to free the world from the spectre of war. Was it just to prevent world war, or was it to make use of the renewed humanism inspired by the San Francisco Conference to eradicate all the causes of armed conflict wherever they might emerge so as, in the words of the Charter, "to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom"?

Now more than in the past, and especially since the end of the cold war, narrow nationalism has been resurfacing to nullify all the international community's efforts to make of our world a global village in which peace and security, friendship among nations and international cooperation are the watchwords. Peace is a sine qua non for the development of peoples and of nations. That truth is easy enough to affirm, but applying it is complicated by the play of interests within States, often combined with outside interference.

This has been and remains the bitter experience of Africa. For nearly a decade, the African continent has faced multifaceted political tension and violence between and within States, just when the end of the cold war had given rise to hope that resources would be mobilized for its development.

Yet during that same period many African countries have courageously embarked on political reform and economic restructuring. Overall, there has been tangible progress. Clearly, stability is indispensable for such progress, which means that questions of international peace and security are the concern of the day on our continent, and more specifically in Central Africa. That subregion, so rich in potential, has come since the end of the cold war to be a world disrupted by "the disorder of nations", fuelled and maintained by a variety of forces.

Although living in peace within its borders and with its neighbours, Gabon is extremely concerned at this situation. President Bongo believes that our country cannot remain an isle of peace, freedom and even relative prosperity in an ocean of misery, violence and fratricidal wars. That concern is shared by the other heads of State of Central Africa, and was at the root of the summit conference held on Thursday, 24 September 1998, at Libreville, at the initiative of President Bongo, on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That important meeting gave heads of State and heads of delegation an opportunity to express their support for President Kabila and to condemn the aggression against the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the interference in the internal affairs of that country. They called for the withdrawal of foreign forces of aggression; for a ceasefire in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; for respect for the territorial integrity of that country; and for continuing the process of democratization begun by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

They also stressed the need for concerted action by the countries of Central Africa, the States members of the Southern African Development Community, of the

Organization of African Unity and of the United Nations, and all those who are working to find a solution to the Congo crisis, renouncing any partisan decisions that could prolong the suffering of the peoples of Congo and of neighbouring States. The heads of State and heads of delegation of Central Africa therefore decided to establish a summit follow-up and negotiating committee under the chairmanship of the President of the Gabonese Republic, and reaffirmed that it would be appropriate to establish a regional peacekeeping force.

Turning to Angola, I wish first to honour the memory of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Maître Alioune Blondin Beye, and of members of his team, who worked tirelessly for peace in that country, tragically giving their lives to that cause. The heads of State and of delegation reaffirmed at the Libreville summit their support for the Government of Angola, which is sparing no effort in the search for lasting peace in that country and for the full and speedy implementation of the Lusaka accords.

Finally, with regard to the Republic of the Congo, the heads of State supported the reconstruction and national reconciliation efforts and condemned the destabilization manoeuvres originating outside the country.

Of course, we are not insensitive to the disturbances and violence occurring in other parts of the world — quite the contrary. Gabon shares the position of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on ways and means of resolving the problems in Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Somalia and between Ethiopia and Eritrea. We are following most attentively the resumption of dialogue between the Israelis and Palestinians, as seen in the recent summit meetings. These talks offer a glimmer of hope for a global settlement of the problems of the Middle East. We likewise believe that only political means will return peace to Afghanistan. With the same conviction, we encourage the efforts of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to preserve peace in South-East Asia.

A global vision of peace is certainly necessary. In fact, through the phenomenon of globalization, the shock wave of conflict is often felt very far from the epicentre. It is equally clear that development cannot be ensured in an unstable environment, for peace constitutes the fertile ground in which development must take root and prosper.

It is in that spirit that Gabon studied the remarkable report (A/52/871) that the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, submitted to the Security Council on the causes of conflict in Africa. He very rightly noted that historical legacies, internal and external factors, economic motives and particular situations are the source of many conflicts in Africa. These various causes are known to us and we must combat them.

In this respect, I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly particularly to one of the causes of conflict that I believe should be given our full attention because of the many dangers it poses to the stability of our entire continent. Furthermore, this phenomenon is also evident in Central and Eastern Europe. I refer to the question of transnational populations — in other words, communities dispersed over several States as a result of various historical circumstances. Aware of the danger in Africa, the founding fathers of the OAU, in their great wisdom, inscribed in its Charter the principle of the inviolability of frontiers inherited from colonization. To reshape States on the basis of diverse claims seemed to them to be simply risky. They therefore chose to take charge of our history through the openness of integration. Gabon reaffirms its support for this approach.

All in all, the resurgence of nationalism, poor understanding and abuse of the rights of peoples as well as their manipulation, inevitably lead to national unrest, with its attendant deadly difficulties. Faced with these realities and possibilities, the Government of Gabon would more than ever like to reaffirm its commitment to certain principles which underlie the maintenance of peace and security, both internally and internationally. These include respect for human rights in general and for the rights of national minorities in particular; respect for cultural identities; respect for the territorial integrity of States; respect for national sovereignty; the principle of non-interference in internal affairs; the principle of good neighbourliness; and the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes.

In any event, dialogue remains the best and most effective way of preventing conflicts and maintaining or restoring peace. Political differences must have a political response. The African populations, already overwhelmed by underdevelopment, cannot and should not have to endure, in addition, the deadly consequences of conflict. We must therefore always engage in dialogue. This is why President Bongo, sensing the changes in history and the aspirations of his people, set in motion in mid-1989 the rethinking within the former single party in our country that led to the national conference of March-April 1990, which reopened the way to pluralism and democracy.

New regulatory and control institutions have gradually been established since then and they are working. Individual and collective freedoms are recognized and enjoyed by our citizens, who can even appeal as high as the Constitutional Court, as a glance at our newspapers in Gabon suffices to make clear. This shows how deeply committed we are to the principles of participatory democracy, taking into account our overall level of development and our sociological environment.

It is also in this new context that in two months we shall be organizing presidential elections for the second time. The logistical and legislative preparations are already at a very advanced stage; they are basically the work of government. The National Electoral Commission, which is already in place, will conduct the actual electoral operations. Its representatives were appointed last week in all departments and communes. The Prime Minister sent invitations a month ago to various States and organizations, including the United Nations, to observe both the preparations and the polling process itself.

A few days ago I had the opportunity to address the Security Council on mechanisms for conflict prevention in our subregion. Without repeating the report that has been made to the Assembly, I would like to recall here that, in accordance with the decision made by the heads of State or Government of the countries of Central Africa, Defence and Interior Ministers of the countries members of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, meeting in Libreville from 28 to 30 April 1998, re-examined the plan for the establishment of an early-warning mechanism as an instrument for the prevention of crises and conflicts. Gabon, which now holds the chairmanship of the Committee, is doing everything in its power to meet the logistics needs to allow Libreville to be the headquarters of that mechanism.

Along the same lines, also concerning the logic of prevention, the Committee held from 18 to 21 May 1998 in Bata, Equatorial Guinea, the first conference on the question of relationships between democratic institutions and peace in Central Africa. That conference brought together members of Governments, representatives of opposition political parties, high-ranking officials of the forces of law and order, representatives of civil society and experts on matters of political freedoms, the press and human rights. The participants' main recommendation was the establishment of a subregional parliament of Central Africa, which would be charged with dealing with questions of common interest, with a view to strengthening measures for confidence-building and subregional peace, while serving as a forum for harmonization of views and the promotion of values related to the democratic experiences of member States. In general, we can say that the action of the Committee is a needed extension of the Organization of African Unity's Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution.

All these preventive measures would be in vain if the international community made no further disarmament efforts. My country supports the high priority given by the United Nations to the question of disarmament in general and to the elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in particular. Even if the harm they can cause is less, we are also concerned about the proliferation of conventional weapons, which are also tools of death and destruction. We therefore commend the statement by the President of the Security Council on the occasion of the ministerial meeting on Africa held on 24 September 1998, in which the Council asked the ad hoc Working Group to elaborate further concrete recommendations on the need to stem illicit arms flows to and in Africa.

The President returned to the Chair.

Apart from these concerns, we have certain grounds for satisfaction. Disarmament took a step forward very recently with the adoption of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, which I personally signed on behalf of Gabon on 4 December 1997 in Ottawa, and which has just entered into force with the deposit of the fortieth instrument of ratification by an African country, Burkina Faso.

Other significant instruments, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, have become a reality. Gabon, convinced of the prominent role of disarmament in the maintenance of international peace and security, is a signatory of these important instruments. My country invites all States Members of the United Nations to work towards complete and general disarmament in the twenty-first century, the guarantor of a lasting peace. We must make the quest for peace a cardinal point of reference.

However, that peace will remain in jeopardy as long as the basic needs of peoples are not met. The persistence of conflicts, non-respect for the human person, hatred and the rejection of democratic values all have serious

repercussions on the economic health of States. Likewise, the phenomenon of refugees and displaced persons, epidemics and the cost of reconstruction in the wake of war all are burdens that affect already fragile economies and aggravate difficult social situations.

The situation at this end of century makes it imperative for the international community to deal with development and social issues if we wish to prevent our world from self-destructing. The content of the 1998 *Human Development Report*, published by the United Nations Development Programme a few weeks ago, strengthens this conviction. The conclusions of the 1995 Copenhagen summit therefore remain valid, and the United Nations must again take the initiative.

Statements of intention no longer suffice. We need concrete action and realistic programmes that take into account the phenomenon of globalization. These programmes must ensure that no one is excluded and that each of our nations, by making the necessary efforts to adapt, can become integrated in the most harmonious way possible. That is why Gabon believes it necessary to relaunch the idea of a new partnership based on fairness in order to respond to the legitimate aspirations of people — mainly, to eliminate poverty and to promote well-being.

With globalization, States' autonomy and room for manoeuvre has been greatly reduced. The power of Governments is offset by the power of the markets. Openness and freedom, however, must not come to mean free rein to establish the law of the jungle, in which we, the small and the weak, will inevitably be crushed and destroyed.

In this context, it seemed necessary to the Government of Gabon not to abdicate but to refocus the role of the State. A new direction has been reflected, *inter alia*, through an ambitious programme of liberalization of economic activities on the one hand and on the other by the privatization of large sectoral public enterprises.

As for the structure of the economy of Gabon, let me say that our country remains dependent on the sale of three principal raw materials: oil, wood and manganese. The prices of these products have been on the decline for several months now. If we factor in the fluctuations in the United States dollar, which is also on the decline, we can see that the result is a decrease in the income of the State, which puts the country's investment and development capacities in considerable jeopardy.

This fact is not the only handicap to my country's development. The debt and its servicing absorb almost 45 per cent of our budgetary resources. This is truly intolerable.

All of this notwithstanding, the international financial institutions continue to classify Gabon as an upper middle-income country, thus preventing its access to financing on flexible terms. Gabon is the only sub-Saharan African country in this situation, which is simply unjust.

Gabon, a developing country just like any other, asks that international financial institutions apply new assessment criteria and, above all, that they give more appropriate consideration to our debt burden in order further to unleash our productive capabilities. This would benefit not only the people of Gabon but also our partners abroad.

Other major problems must also mobilize the international community, *inter alia*, the drug problem, terrorism, major pandemics, human rights and the environment.

The General Assembly held its twentieth special session on the fight against drugs last June. Gabon is pleased that on that occasion our Organization enshrined the criminal nature of the traffic in drugs and broadened the options for solutions to this scourge at the global level. That session gave political impetus to the international efforts of States in the fight against drug trafficking, which now spares no country. The Government of Gabon invites the United Nations and its specialized agencies to further support the efforts made in this respect at the regional level.

As for the scourge of terrorism, and bearing in mind the horrible attacks in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam, I must first of all pay a tribute of compassion and respect to the memory of the Kenyan, Tanzanian and American citizens who lost their lives there. I express my deepest sympathy to all of those persons who were wounded. Above all, the Government of Gabon most forcefully reaffirms its condemnation of acts of terrorism in all their manifestations, wherever they may occur. We believe that no cause can justify resorting to such acts. But I also denounce certain retaliatory measures that they inspire, in particular the placing of countries that are suspected of involvement under embargo. This type of response is neither appropriate nor efficient. In most cases, those

types of measures affect mainly innocent civilian populations.

We believe, therefore, that under the auspices of the United Nations, urgent dialogue must be undertaken to explore ways and means of preventing and combating terrorism.

In the field of human rights, Gabon welcomes the creation of an International Criminal Court, as established by the Statute adopted at Rome on 17 July last. The same applies to the Organization of African Unity Protocol, which created, at the organization's thirty-fourth summit, a Pan-African Court of Justice.

Because of industrial development, environmental questions have become an increasingly pressing concern for the international community. The awareness to which the Rio Summit gave rise unfortunately was not followed up by the concrete measures that were expected. Commitments have not been fulfilled, and as time goes by, the Rio consensus must lead us more than ever towards a necessary commitment if we wish to avoid its remaining a dead letter.

I should like also to take this opportunity to express my delegation's satisfaction with, and its support for, the efforts made by the International Seabed Authority, the guarantor of a common heritage of humankind, in the consideration of a draft code on the mining, exploration and exploitation of the seabed.

We must make sincere and tireless efforts on all of these major issues. I very much appreciate the work of our Organization, which, through its executing bodies, its specialized agencies and with the support of other organizations, is making every effort to achieve these noble objectives.

As I already said last year, Gabon supports the idea that the United Nations system needs rational and consistent renewal, in keeping with today's realities. The proposals of the Secretary-General on the reform of the budgetary, administrative, social and economic sectors reflect a spirit of innovation that will make it possible to face the challenges of the new millennium.

More specifically, as regards the thorny question of the expansion of the Security Council, Gabon is, of course, in favour of it. We believe Africa should have two permanent seats — I repeat, two permanent seats — which would be occupied on a rotational basis by all African countries — I repeat, all African countries — in accordance with modalities to be determined by them.

Before concluding, allow me to commend the achievements of Secretary-General Kofi Annan. We know his task is immense and difficult. He has already accomplished a great deal, with courage and skill. I have already mentioned the promising views he shared with the Security Council on the eradication of conflicts and the promotion of lasting peace in Africa. For Africa, and for the entire international community, we must encourage and support him.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting.

Agenda item 20

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Draft resolution (A/53/L.1)

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I give the floor to the representative of Indonesia to introduce draft resolution A/53/L.1.

Mr. Hidayat (Indonesia): Before I introduce this draft resolution, I would like to make a small correction to the text. The draft resolution is submitted by Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

It is a matter of great honour for my delegation to introduce, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, the draft resolution contained in the document A/53/L.1, entitled "Assistance to Bangladesh in the wake of the devastating floods", under agenda item 20 (b), entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions".

It is with a heavy conscience that I introduce this draft resolution on the alarming conditions in the wake of one of the most disastrous floods to hit the people of Bangladesh in recent memory. The magnitude of the

widespread destruction and the toll in human life has not only made this natural disaster a major calamity, it has far exceeded the capacity and resources of the people and the Government of Bangladesh to cope with it.

In this context, we are certainly encouraged by the resilience and courage of the people and the Government of Bangladesh in their effort to alleviate the suffering of disaster victims and to put the country back on the road to development. At the same time, however, we acknowledge that there are limitations to the Government's ability to overcome these difficulties which constitute a development problem of great magnitude. It is therefore imperative that the international community demonstrate its solidarity in mobilizing resources — both financial and technical assistance — to support the effort already undertaken by the people and the Government of Bangladesh.

We need also to ensure that the assistance mobilized will not only alleviate the present suffering but also go a long way on the path towards reconstruction and development. Therefore, the Group of 77 and China seriously appeal to all Member States to support this draft resolution at this hour of the Bangladeshi people's greatest need.

Before concluding, I have the pleasure to announce that a number of countries have expressed their desire to sponsor the draft resolution. In addition to the countries of the Group of 77 and China, these countries are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

Mr. Manz (Austria): Very briefly, allow me, on behalf of the European Union, to express our deep sympathy and concern regarding the loss of life and the unprecedented destruction of property and infrastructure caused by the worst ever floods in Bangladesh. The European Union is aware that this disaster constitutes a major challenge for the development of the country, calling for national and international financial and technical assistance. The European Community and its member States have contributed generously to assist in the immediate relief and rehabilitation efforts. For this reason, the member States of the European Union have co-sponsored this draft resolution.

Mr. Kamitani (Japan): On behalf of the delegation of Japan, I would like to salute the draft resolution about to be adopted by the General Assembly entitled "Assistance to Bangladesh in the wake of the devastating floods".

Japan is greatly concerned about the extensive damage caused by the floods that have stuck Bangladesh one after the other since mid-July, rendering 52 of the country's 64 districts a disaster area.

At the end of August, the Government of Japan donated emergency humanitarian assistance, such as medicine, medical equipment, water-purifying tablets and plastic sheets, valued at about 30 million yen, to the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Today, 1 October, my Government decided to dispatch a Japan disaster-relief team of experts to Bangladesh and to donate related emergency material assistance, such as medicine and water-purifying tablets, again worth a total of about 30 million yen. Furthermore, on 2 October, in view of the extent of the damage, the Government of Japan is scheduled to announce that it will provide the Government of Bangladesh with $400,000 in emergency assistance on humanitarian grounds.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/53/L.1, entitled "Assistance to Bangladesh in the wake of the devastating floods".

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft resolution?

Draft resolution A/53/L.1 was adopted (resolution 53/1).

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): I would like to express, on behalf of the Government of Bangladesh, our gratitude for the adoption by consensus at this plenary meeting of the General Assembly resolution 53/1, entitled "Assistance to Bangladesh in the wake of the devastating floods". Coincidentally, this is the first resolution to be adopted by the fifty-third session.

The magnitude of the floods this year was unprecedented. It overwhelmed our normal ability and preparation for adequate response. Quick mobilization of assistance in support of the efforts of the Bangladesh

Government by all Member States, the United Nations system, multilateral and regional financial institutions and non-governmental organizations necessitated that we adopt a resolution at this session of the General Assembly with such urgency.

The resolution just adopted will have the effect of harmonizing the ongoing efforts of different entities that stepped forward to extend assistance to Bangladesh. The resolution expresses solidarity with the Government and the people of Bangladesh and appeals to all Member States and the United Nations system to respond urgently to assist Bangladesh in its efforts to overcome the damages caused by the floods.

The General Assembly expresses its appreciation to the Secretary-General for the steps he took to mobilize humanitarian assistance and requests the United Nations system to take all necessary measures to support Bangladesh and to strengthen its capacity for seeking a long-term solution to problems caused by floods and natural disasters.

The Government of Bangladesh conveys its deep appreciation to Indonesia, which submitted and introduced the draft resolution on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, as its Chairman. I would also like to sincerely thank all the delegations that have spontaneously come forward to support and sponsor the resolution on very short notice.

A General Assembly resolution is the expression of opinion of the entire world. Through the adoption of today's resolution, the entire United Nations membership and the international community have expressed solidarity with the Government and the people of Bangladesh.

The country is now effectively engaged in relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities under the dynamic and compassionate leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

I wish to thank all Member States again for standing by our side in Bangladesh's hour of need.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (b) of agenda item 20.

The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.